

Consecuencias del cambio climático en la salud mental

Resumen

El cambio climático es la causa de las alteraciones en el clima y en el medio ambiente, que pueden provocar eventos extremos como sequías e inundaciones. Por lo que, este factor pone en peligro la supervivencia de muchas especies y ecosistemas. Además, el cambio climático puede ser una gran amenaza para la identidad de las comunidades cuya forma de vida depende del medio ambiente. Por ello, esta revisión bibliográfica se centra en las consecuencias psicológicas que tiene el cambio climático en la salud mental. Los impactos directos de este fenómeno, como los incendios forestales o los impactos indirectos como la exposición repetida a información referente a las transformaciones que sufre el medio ambiente, pueden provocar alteraciones emocionales. Algunas de estas consecuencias pueden ser ansiedad, alteraciones del estado de ánimo o síndromes psicoterráticos. Un factor de riesgo podría ser un alto grado de neuroticismo, mientras que un factor protector sería un alto nivel de apertura. Por lo que, sería conveniente investigar intervenciones psicológicas que nos permitieran afrontarlo de una forma más adaptativa. Estas estrategias podrían estar enfocadas a promover la resiliencia y el compromiso conductual ante el desafío que plantea este fenómeno. Asimismo, sería recomendable desarrollar políticas que permitan alcanzar la meta número 13 de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible de la ONU, es decir, adoptar medidas urgentes para combatir el cambio climático y sus efectos.

Palabras clave: cambio climático, salud mental, ansiedad, solastalgia, eventos extremos.

Abstract

Climate change is the cause of alterations in the climate and the environment, which can cause extreme events such as droughts and floods. Thus, this factor endangers the survival of many species and ecosystems. Furthermore, climate change can be a major threat to the identity of the communities whose way of life is dependent on the environment. For this reason, this bibliographic review focuses on the psychological consequences that climate change has on mental health. The direct impacts of this phenomenon, such as forest fires, or indirect impacts such as repeated exposure to information about changes in the environment, can cause emotional disturbances. Some of these consequences could be anxiety, alterations in mood or psychoterratic syndromes. A risk factor could be a high degree of neuroticism, while a protective factor would be a high level of openness. Therefore, it would be convenient to investigate psychological interventions which would allow us to face it in a more adaptive way. These strategies could be focused on promoting resilience and behavioural commitment in the face of the challenge posed by this phenomenon. Likewise, it would be advisable to develop policies that make it possible to achieve goal number 13 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, that is, to adopt urgent measures to combat climate change and its effects.

Keywords: climate change, mental health, anxiety, solastalgia, extreme events.

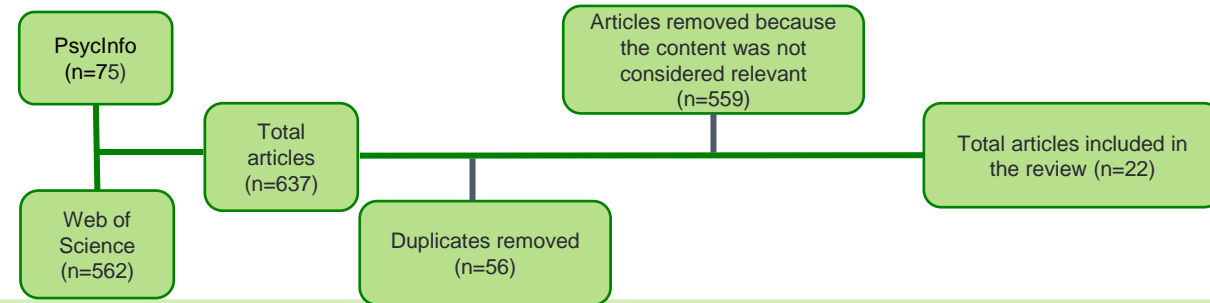


INTRODUCTION

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as "any change in climate over time due to natural variability or as a result of human activities." There is sufficient scientific evidence to state that currently climate change is caused by human action. On climate change, these fluctuations and their consequent effects on the environment can take the form of extreme events. Those circumstances can be represented as heat waves and droughts. Likewise, it can also be represented through more gradual changes; for example the increase in the average temperature of the planet or the ocean. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the main effects of climate change on mental health, either through exposure to extreme weather events or more gradual changes.

METHOD

- The bibliographic review was done in the databases of PsycInfo and Web Of Science, where the search terms were "mental health" and "climate change".
- The selected articles were published between 2005 and 2020, both years included.



RESULTS/DISCUSSION

- Anxiety, depression, anger, pain and denial responses are psychological effects from climate change.
- The psychological consequences of climate change include disorders related to anxiety, mood, depression, adaptation, substance abuse, violence, domestic problems and PTSD (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020)
- The main response to extreme weather events is PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- There are high suicide rates in some populations affected by climate change (Hanigan et al., 2012).
- The psychoterratic syndromes according to Albrecht (2011) are:
 - ✓ **Eco-anxiety**: fear associated with negative environmental information.
 - ✓ **Ecoparalysis**: the inability to act on environmental challenges due to the perception that they are untreatable (Moser, 2007).
 - ✓ **Econostalgia**: perception of that a geographic location was better in the past.
- Ecological grief is the pain experienced due to the current or expected physical ecological losses. One example could be the extinction of species or the removal of important landscapes.
- FACTORS**
 - **Risk factors** are direct exposure to extreme and adverse weather events, low-income contexts, restricted health services, resource limitations, low literacy rates and living in communities with a lack of social support. In addition to the existence of previous mental health problems, some personality characteristics such as low tolerance for uncertainty and a high degree of neuroticism can make people more prone to experience emotional issues. Moreover, children, young adults, indigenous, rural communities and people forced to migrate are more likely to develop mental illness.
 - **Protective factors** are openness (Verplanken & Roy, 2013), resilience and behavioural engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

The psychological consequences of extreme weather events can be expressed through anxiety, depression, violent behaviour or PTSD. Furthermore, the long-term consequences of climate change can lead to identity problems and chronic environmental stress. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate strategies that are effective to reduce the psychological problems that climate change generates. In order to achieve this goal, a strategy that could be effective would be the creation of policies that directly combat it, which is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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