

Lesson Plan: Climate Change Impacts on Mental Health

As an **Undergraduate** teacher of **Psychology** in the **Social Sciences** you can use this lesson plan to teach your students impacts of climate change on **mental health** and **well-being**.

This lesson plan provides an overview of several mental health consequences of global warming. These include stress and distress symptoms and clinical disorders like anxiety, depression, and even suicidality amongst others. It addresses how climate change and its impacts can affect the perceptions of everyday experiences and life of individuals and communities. And further highlights how mental health consequences of the impacts of global warming often are linked with other social and environmental stresses. These effects are direct and indirect, are complex, multi-level and can be acute or gradual. This lesson plan further emphasizes how the mental health and well-being consequences of climate change are a crucial in understanding how climate change impacts human health overall.

Thus, the use of this lesson plan allows you to teach aspects of **Psychology** in your **Social Sciences** classroom. This lesson plan can be used as a module in a **Psychological Disorders** or **Mental Health** courses or as a topic in **Psychological Disorders** or **Therapy** or **Stress, Lifestyle, and Health** sections in an Introductory Psychology course.

Use this lesson plan to help your students find answers to:

- What are the mental health consequences of climate change?
- Discuss the multi-layered and interconnectedness of physical impacts, human systems and infrastructure impacts, and human health impacts of climate change.
- What are the connections between the mental, physical and community health aspects of human health and well-being?
- What are some direct and indirect mental health consequences of the impacts of global warming such as due to extreme weather events and natural disasters?
- What are some psychosocial mediators of climate change impacts?
- How do people adapt to and cope with the perceived threat of climate change?

About the Lesson Plan

Grade Level: Undergraduate

Discipline: Social Sciences, Psychology

Topic(s) in Discipline: Psychological Disorders, Mental Health, Stress, Anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Suicide, Depression, Well-being, Climate Change and Mental Health, Climate and Society

Climate Topic: Climate Change and the Anthroposphere

Location: Global

Access: Online

Language(s): English

Approximate Time Required: 90 min

1 Contents

1. Readings (30 min)

Reading to introduce Psychosocial and Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change from the Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change. This report is titled 'Psychology & Global Climate Change: Addressing a multifaceted phenomenon and set of challenges'.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-change-booklet.pdf>

2. Video (25 min)

A video titled 'Mental Health Issues and Climate Change,' by Prof Susan Clayton.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ-wcx1EXao&list=PLE8B1470B8A846BB1&index=22>

3. Classroom Exercise (30 min)

Classroom exercise from a teaching module titled 'Climate Change: A Human Health Perspective. A Student Exploration of the Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States' by Dana Brown Haine and Stefani Dawn and hosted at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

This can be accessed at:

https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/assets/docs_a_e/climate_change_and_human_health_lesson_plan_a_508.pdf

4. Suggested questions/assignments for learning evaluation

- What are the mental health consequences of climate change?
- Discuss the multi-layered and interconnectedness of physical impacts, human systems and infrastructure impacts, and human health impacts of climate change.
- What are the connections between the mental, physical and community health aspects of human health and well-being?
- What are some direct and indirect mental health consequences of the impacts of global warming such as due to extreme weather events and natural disasters?
- What are some psychosocial mediators of climate change impacts?
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2 Step-by-step User Guide

Here is a step-by-step guide to using this lesson plan in the classroom/laboratory. We have suggested these steps as a possible plan of action. You may customize the lesson plan according to your preferences and requirements.

1. Introduction to Climate Change and Mental Health and Well-Being

Introduce your students to the lesson plan by providing an overview of the Psychosocial and Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change. You may proceed with your own lecture material or can provide your students with a reading from the Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change. This report is titled 'Psychology & Global Climate Change: Addressing a multifaceted phenomenon and set of challenges'.

This resource can be accessed at:

<https://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-change-booklet.pdf>

Instruct your students to read Section 3: What Are the Psychosocial Impacts of Climate Change? Pages 42-49 and Section 4: How Do People Adapt to and Cope With the Perceived Threat and Unfolding Impacts of Climate Change? Pages 52-61.

You can use this resource to provide an overview to your students on the psychosocial and mental health impacts of climate change and its impacts. Discuss the issue with your students and emphasize the following main points from the readings.

- Psychosocial and Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change
- Social and Community impacts of climate change
- Psychosocial Mediators of Climate Change Impacts
- Global Climate Change in Context of Other Environmental Challenges
- Psychological Benefits Associated With Responding to Climate Change
- Relationship Between Psychosocial Impacts and Coping
- How Do People Adapt to and Cope With the Perceived Threat of Climate Change?
- Climate Change Threat and Environmental Impacts as Stressors
- Mediating Relations Between Stressors and Coping Responses
- Types of Coping Responses
- Interventions

2. Extend understanding

Next, further your students understanding of the topic through a video lecture. This video lecture is titled 'Mental Health Issues and Climate Change,' by Prof Susan Clayton.

This resource can be accessed at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ-wcx1EXao&list=PLE8B1470B8A846BB1&index=22>

In this video Prof Clayton discusses why it is important to discuss the health impacts of climate change, particularly the mental health and well-being aspects. Have your students watch this video lecture and conduct a classroom discussion. Emphasize the main points of the lecture in your discussion including the complexities of climate change and health impacts and how climate change can have direct or indirect effects on mental

health and well-being and that these can be acute or gradual. Discuss the multi-layered and interconnectedness of physical impacts, human systems and infrastructure impacts, and human health impacts of climate change. Further stress on the connections between the mental, physical and community health of human health impacts of climate change. Note all the psychosocial and mental health consequences of global warming such as anxiety, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (ptsd), grief, chronic psychological dysfunction, and depression. Also draw your students' attention to how people are responsive to messages around health and so it can be an effective way to addressing the climate crisis.

3. Conduct a classroom activity

Next, conduct a classroom activity and discussion using a teaching module. This teaching module titled 'Climate Change: A Human Health Perspective. A Student Exploration of the Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States' has been developed by Dana Brown Haine and Stefani Dawn and is hosted at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

This teaching module serves as an excellent resource for your students to learn about the impacts of climate change on human health. The topics in the module are Temperature-related Death and Illness; Air Quality Impacts; Extreme Events; Vector-Borne Diseases; Water-Related Illness; Food Safety, Nutrition, and Distribution; and Mental Health and Well-Being.

This resource can be accessed at

https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/assets/docs_a_e/climate_change_and_human_health_lesson_plan_a_508.pdf

Direct your students to Chapter 8: Mental Health and Well-Being. Have your students read the chapter and do the suggested exercises. Discuss with your students the pathways of **Climate Drivers** such as altered weather patterns, temperature changes; **Exposure Pathways**; **Mental Health Outcomes** such as anxiety, emotional stress, acute traumatic stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (ptsd), grief, chronic psychological dysfunction, depression, poor concentration, sleep disorders amongst others; and **Vulnerable Populations** like children, the elderly, women (especially pregnant and postpartum women), people with pre-existing mental illness, economically disadvantaged and homeless and others.

4. Questions/Assignments

Use the tools and the concepts learned so far to discuss and determine answers to the following questions:

- What are the mental health consequences of climate change?

- Discuss the multi-layered and interconnectedness of physical impacts, human systems and infrastructure impacts, and human health impacts of climate change.
- What are the connections between the mental, physical and community health aspects of human health and well-being?
- What are some direct and indirect mental health consequences of the impacts of global warming such as due to extreme weather events and natural disasters?
- What are some psychosocial mediators of climate change impacts?
- How do people adapt to and cope with the perceived threat of climate change?

3 Learning Outcomes

The tools in this lesson plan will enable students to:

- learn about the mental health consequences of climate change
- understand the physical impacts, human systems and infrastructure impacts, and human health impacts of climate change.
- understand the connections between the mental, physical and community health aspects of human health and well-being
- discuss some direct and indirect mental health consequences of the impacts of global warming
- understand how people adapt to and cope with the perceived threat of climate change?

4 Additional Resources

If you or your students would like to explore the topic further, these additional resources will be useful.

1. Audio; 'Climate change and mental health'

One of a four-part series by Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUI2YkBTpY>

2. Video; 'Climate Psychiatry: The Diverse Challenges of Climate to Mental Health'

By Drs. Robin Cooper and Alex Trope, Department of Psychiatry, UCSF. On University of California Television (UCTV).

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zpKgje9JHk>

3. Video; 'Mental Health Issues and Climate Health'

By Lise Van Susteren, MD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Georgetown University.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn9TlyhZBAw&list=PLE8B1470B8A846BB1&index=15>

4. Audio; 'Speaking of Psychology: The Psychology of Climate Change'

By Susan Clayton PhD, hosted at The American Psychological Association (APA).

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.apa.org/research/action/speaking-of-psychology/climate-change-impact>

5 Credits/Copyrights

All the teaching tools in our collated list are owned by the corresponding creators/authors/organizations as listed on their websites. Please view the individual copyright and ownership details for each tool by following the individual links provided. We have selected and analyzed the tools that align with the overall objective of our project and have provided the corresponding links. We do not claim ownership of or responsibility/liability for any of the listed tools.

1. Reading; 'Psychology & Global Climate Change: Addressing a multifaceted phenomenon and set of challenges'

[The American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#)

2. Video; 'Mental Health Issues and Climate Change'

By [Susan Clayton](#), PhD, The College of Wooster.

3. Teaching Module; 'Climate Change: A Human Health Perspective. A Student Exploration of the Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States'

Developed by Dana Brown Haine and Stefani Dawn and is hosted at the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](#)

4. Additional Resources

[Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health](#)

[University of California Television \(UCTV\)](#)

[Dr. Lise Van Susteren](#)

[Susan Clayton, PhD](#) for [The American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#)