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WPA Section: Ecology, Psychiatry, Mental Health

General statement about the section

Never before as nowadays the ecological question has entered into the survival of our society. The opinion of the scientific community about the state of the planet is a great concern. In fact, anthropization and its consequences have greatly weakened the power of the biosphere to keep the climatic parameters that have characterised the last millennia relatively stable.

Especially climates have become more unstable in recent decades. The systemic props that guarantee climate reliability are entering tipping points. Two areas of crisis are thus highlighted: in one side we see increase in the frequency and intensity and geographical dislocation of extreme climate events (ECEs) (wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, storms, floods and droughts) and on the other long-term changes are even more challenging if significant action is not taken. This situation is affected by all living species that have started compensation phenomena, of subsidence on their natural territories. Many are already under threat of extinction. The continuous damage to the ecosystems on which we depend for survival on our planet has led us to the urgency of planning some sort of joint action to achieve acceptable living conditions for all. Climate change is an urgent economic, social, and existential threat to human beings worldwide. No nation, organisation or group can achieve these goals on its own; in reason of this there is no other way than the creation of a world alliance in order to arrive at a model of sustained development.

It is widely documented that human mental health and well-being emerges from a complex interplay between genetic, psychological, social and lifestyle factors and environmental exposures. Vulnerability and resilience to climate changes are a broad, flexible and complex phenomena at societal, and individual level, and they are far from being assessed at any level.

WHO has already identified vulnerable groups and conditions. A growing body of empirical evidence is revealing the value of nature experience for mental health. Mental health effects of climate change range from minimal stress and distress symptoms to clinical disorders. Maladjustment to climate regime shift occur in the population in the form of discomfort and mental disorders. Scholars identify mental disorders such as acute stress disorders or post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), depression, anxiety increased suicide rate, increased substance/alcohol abuse. Many exposed people exhibit more complex phenomenology such as hostile and violent behaviours, adjustment disorders, paranoia, physiological hyperarousal, chronic dissociation, detachment and cognitive symptoms, poor quality of sleep, increased domestic violence, increase in psychosomatic illnesses and loss of social identity. With rapid urbanisation and declines in human contact with nature globally, crucial decisions must be made about how to preserve and enhance opportunities for nature experience.

In recent years, evidence on the interplay between mental health and the environment has grown significantly, and the COVID-19 crisis, with its foreseeable and unforeseen socio-economic implications, adds a more urgent need for policy and decision makers to identify and implement win-win solutions to both challenges. The WPA Section on Ecology, Psychiatry and Mental Health has identified and developed interests and peculiarities of the present reality such as: the psychiatric consequences of natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, etc.); post-traumatic stress disorder; the nature and structure of traumatic events and the study of reaction processes; environmental risks at work and the repercussions on mental health; natural disasters and any war events suffered by immigrant populations and their consequences on individual mental health; implications and repercussions of the ecological operator in interpersonal and social relationships; environmental degradation and pollution as a threat to mental health; the role of nature in the treatment of mental health conditions; possible synergies with the International Red Cross, the Civil Protection and other NGOs.