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What every mental health professional should know about the climate crisis

Dr Amelia Cussans
Psychiatry Registrar

“Climate change is an existential threat to humanity and the ecosystems we rely on, impacting many aspects of human life, including **mental health.**”

THE LANCET



RCPsych declares a climate and ecological emergency

Online news

05 May 2021

Climate action must include mental health

To protect people's
physical and mental health
from climate threats



World Health
Organization



EXACERBATES HEALTH INJUSTICE

Air Pollution

Evidence shows link between long-term exposure to air pollution and depression and anxiety

Possible link between short term Exposure to air pollution and suicide

Wildfires

Wildfires near human settlements have been linked to PTSD

Heat

Heat is linked to the use of mental health services

Evidence of link between hot weather and mental health issues

Floods

Flooding is associated with increasing risk of mental health issues

Accelerated climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of flooding

For managers, the most vulnerable and poorest are worst affected

Flooding can lead to displacement and loss of property, which leads to a range of mental health issues

Droughts

Droughts can lead to displacement and loss of property, which leads to a range of mental health issues

Day of 40C shocks scientists as UK heat record 'absolutely obliterated'

Experts worried that extreme heatwaves in Europe happening quicker than expected, suggesting climate crisis worse than feared

Extreme heat killed more than 60,000 people in Europe in 2022, research finds

Thousands of people in the UK were found to be among those who died in the extreme conditions, while scientists said the most intense period across Europe was between mid-July and mid-August when nearly 40,000 people died.

Heat

Hotter weather is linked to higher use of mental health services

Firm Evidence of link between hot weather and higher suicide rates

Link between hot weather and higher mortality rates among people with mental health issues



News

Climate emergency: 90% of NHS buildings are vulnerable to overheating, warns UK health alliance

Chaos after heat crashes computers at leading London hospitals

Patient safety compromised during IT failure at Guy's and St Thomas'



St Thomas' hospital, London, had to cancel operations, postpone appointments and divert patients to other centres. Photograph: One-image Photography/Alamy

Overheating incidents at NHS sites in England nearly doubled from 2980 in 2016-17 to 5554 in 2021-22.



'It's hard to go back': Dealing with trauma

Wildfires



The Independent

Study points to alarming link between
children's mental health

Neuro
smo
Alzhe
diseas

Wildfires near human
settlements have been
shown to cause PTSD
depression and
substance misuse



Brazilian Amazon




India



Congo



Madagascar



**Droughts are worsening as
climate change accelerates**

**Women, teenagers, the
elderly, farmers and poorer
people worst affected**

**Leads to displacement
which leads to range of
mental health issues**

Droughts




25 million people have been displaced by climate-related disasters every year since 2008



1 in 6 properties in England are at risk from flooding

Climate change contributed to increasing the amount of total rainfall by about 15% with storms becoming 20% more intense

Torrential winter rains are arriving 20 years earlier than climate models projected

An illustration showing a young woman with a distressed expression standing in floodwaters. An elderly man with grey hair is embracing her from behind, his face buried in her shoulder as if crying. The background shows a flooded street with a car partially submerged and a city skyline in the distance under a grey, overcast sky.

The impacts of flooding are not experienced equally, with low-income households, as well as individuals with medical conditions or disabilities, being hit the hardest.

UK study shows

36% of flood victims experience PTSD

28% of the flood victims experience anxiety

20% of flood victims experience depression

Floods

London flooding: Major incident declared as emergency departments flooded at two hospitals

Heavy rain has caused scenes of chaos across the capital

Oliver O'Connell | Sunday 25 July 2021 20:07 | 3 comments



NHS flooding incidents up 40% as climate change hits hospitals

More than 200 killed in Valencia floods as torrential rain hits another Spain region

🕒 1 November 2024



'Neighbourhoods buried under mud': Sri Lanka floods death toll reaches 334

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake declares a state of emergency to deal with the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah.

30 Nov 2025



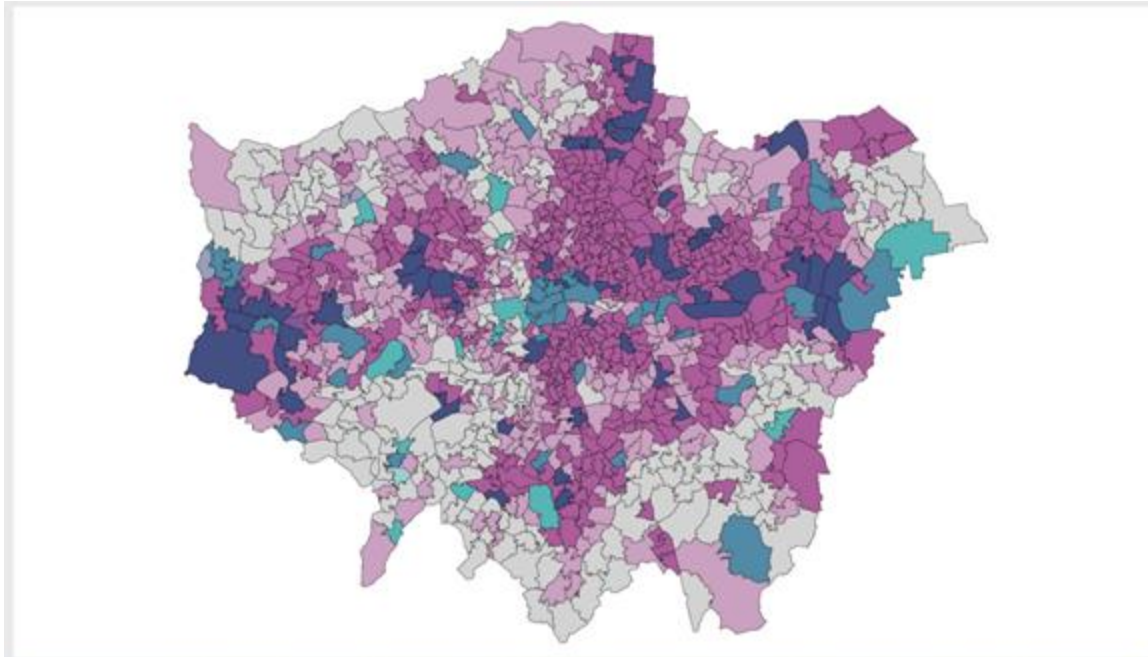


Air Pollution

Evidence shows link between long-term exposure to air pollution and depression and anxiety

Possible link between short term Exposure to air pollution and suicide

Sacrifice Zones



Top areas at risk in London are North Acton, Ealing; Rylands Estate and Dagenham Dock, Barking and Dagenham; Old Oak and Wormwood, Hammersmith and Fullham; Brimsdown and Ponders End, Enfield; Beckton, Newham and Spitalfields, and Tower Hamlets.



Ella Kissi-Debra, South East London

Ella lived near the heavily polluted South Circular and died age 9 from an asthma attack secondary to air pollution

"Climate change is driving a **public mental health crisis** that disproportionately, and **unjustly**, affects the world's **young people.**"

*Climate emergency, young people and mental health:
time for justice and health professional action (April
2022)*

BMJ Paediatrics Open



"The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say – we will never forgive you."

– Greta Thunberg, UN Climate Summit, New York, 23 September 2019



SHARE OF GLOBAL POPULATION BY INCOME

SHARE OF CONSUMPTION-BASED CO₂ EMISSIONS, 2019

TOP 1%
WITHIN
10%



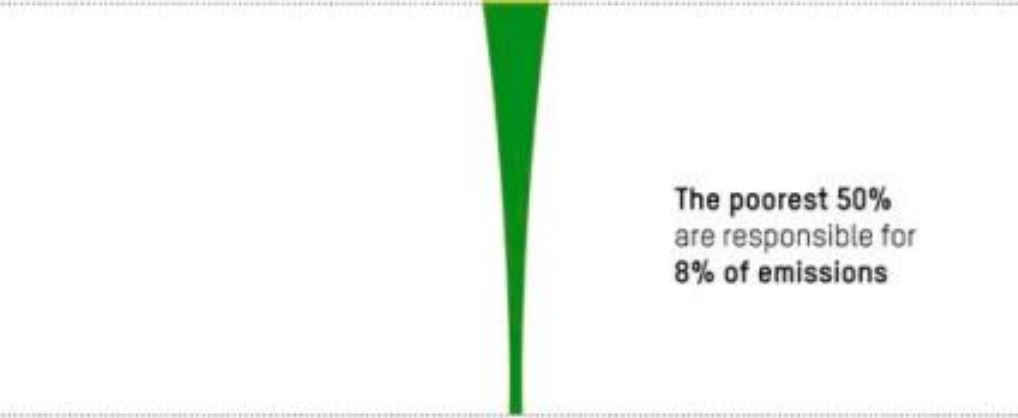
The richest 10%
are responsible for
50% of emissions

MIDDLE
40%



The middle 40%
are responsible for
43% of emissions

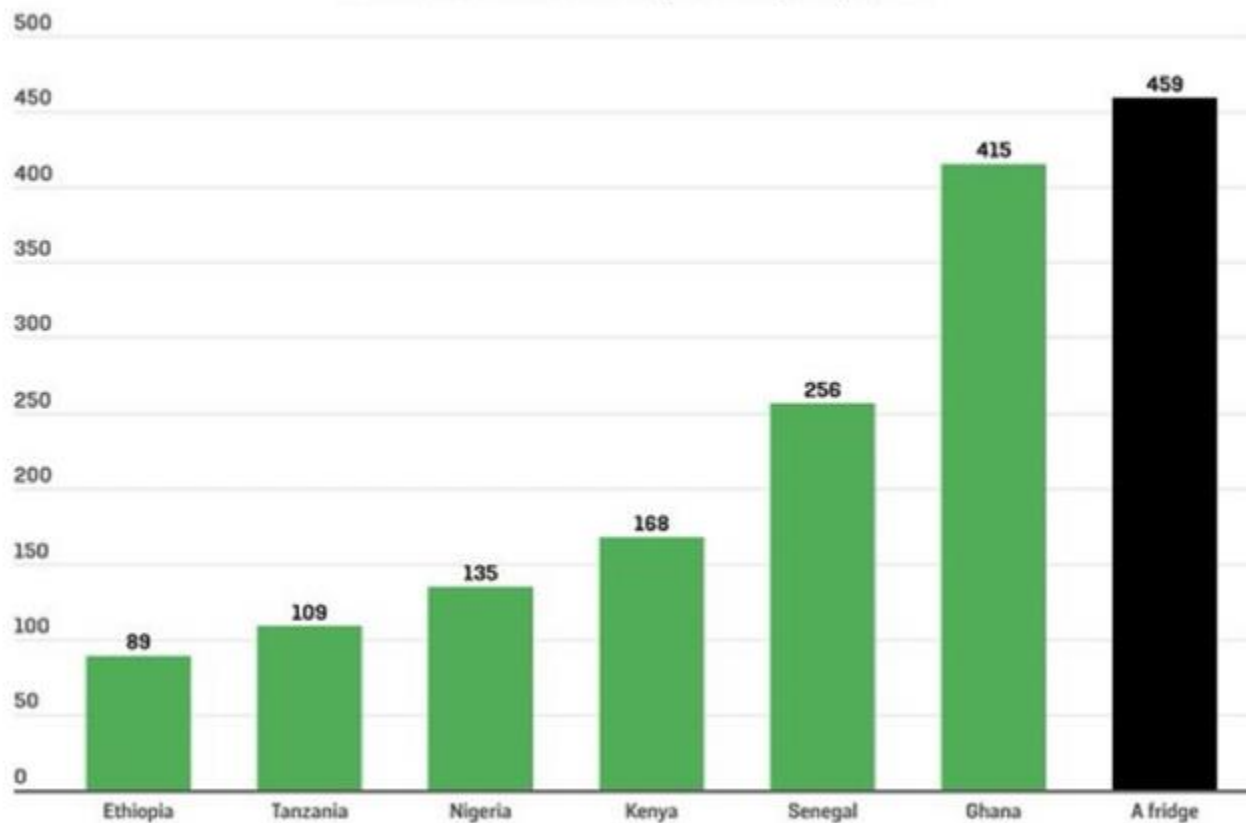
BOTTOM
50%



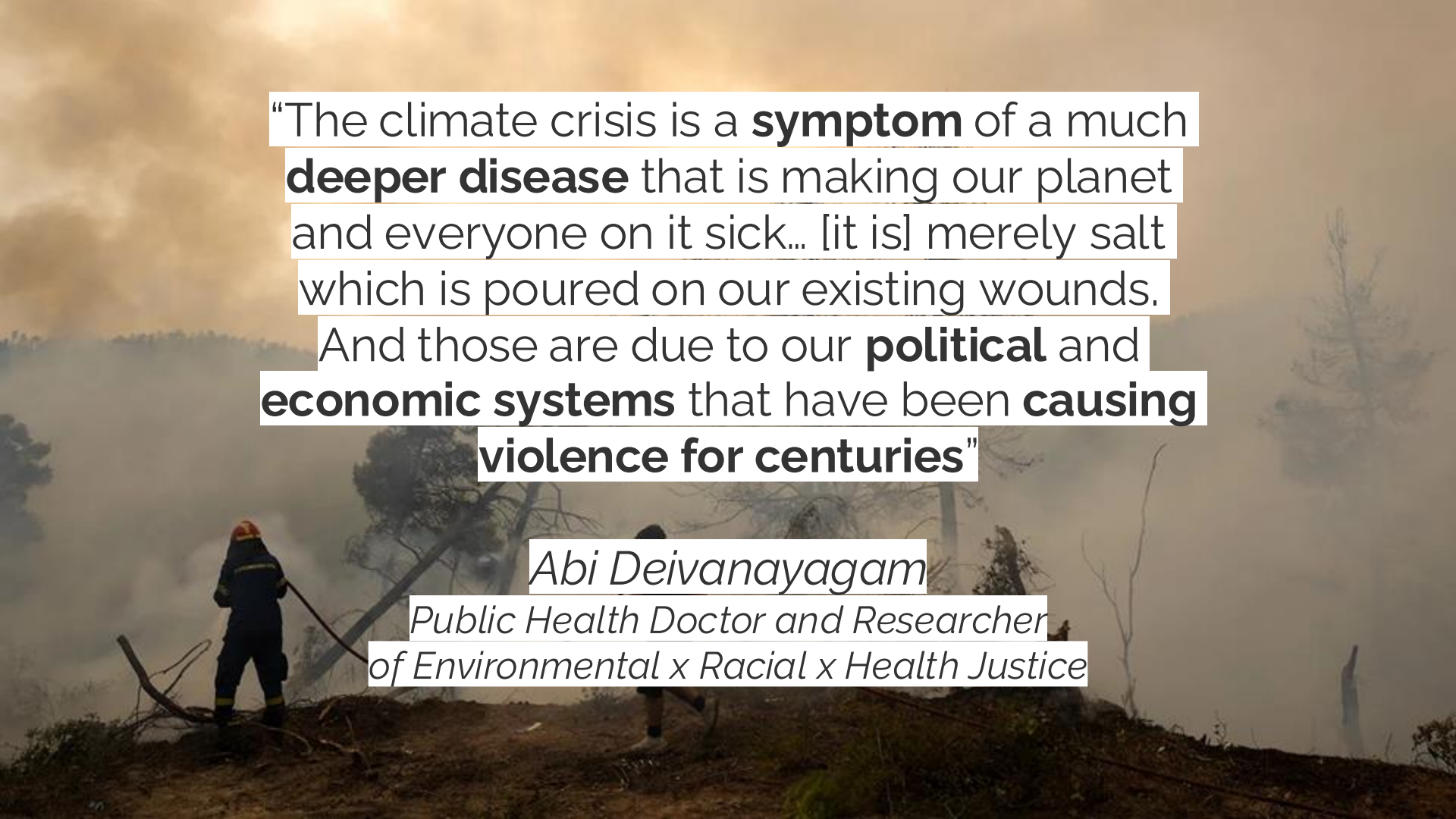
The poorest 50%
are responsible for
8% of emissions

African Energy Use Per Person Vs. a Typical American Refrigerator

Annual kilowatt-hours of electricity consumed per capita, 2017



SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY AND ENERGY FOR GROWTH HUB



“The climate crisis is a **symptom** of a much **deeper disease** that is making our planet and everyone on it sick... [it is] merely salt which is poured on our existing wounds.

And those are due to our **political** and **economic systems** that have been **causing violence for centuries”**

Abi Deivanayagam

*Public Health Doctor and Researcher
of Environmental x Racial x Health Justice*

The root cause of the climate crisis is **extractivism** - a capitalist system of exploitation and oppression, where health of people and the planet are sacrificed for economic growth.



Duties of a doctor

General
Medical
Council

"You must take prompt action if you think that patient safety, dignity or comfort may be compromised."



A black and white photograph of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored top and a necklace. She is holding a large black sign with white text. The sign contains a quote from António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, dated April 2022. The quote reads: "THE TRULY DANGEROUS RADICALS ARE THE COUNTRIES THAT ARE INCREASING PRODUCTION OF FOSSIL FUELS". The woman is standing in front of a building with a window and a railing.

**"THE TRULY
DANGEROUS RADICALS
ARE THE COUNTRIES THAT ARE
INCREASING PRODUCTION OF
FOSSIL FUELS"**

António Guterres
UN Secretary General, April 2022