

Institute for Social Science Research - HDR Student Project

ISSR Impact Area: Health

Title: *Climate change and mental health – exploring trends across Australia & the UK*

Supervisor/s: [Dr Anne Cleary](#), [Dr Ben Wheeler](#)

Funding:

This scholarship includes a living stipend of AUD \$28,092 (2020) tax free, indexed annually, tuition fees and Overseas Student Health Cover (where applicable). A travel grant of AUD \$8,500 per annum, and a training grant of AUD \$3,000 are also available over the program.

Project description:

Climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. While certain physical health impacts of climate change are well understood, for example heat-related morbidity and mortality, the acute and chronic mental health impacts of climate change remain poorly understood. Depression is already the single largest contributor to global disability. Failing to adequately consider the climate change implications on mental health could further exacerbate and accelerate growing global trends in mental ill-health.

Climate change compounds existing health inequalities with society's vulnerable communities most at risk to climate change's impacts on mental health. Ensuring healthy lives and wellbeing for all requires an understanding of these inequitable impacts of climate change on the mental health of marginalized and vulnerable populations.

The many varied links between climate change and mental health, which are highly socially and culturally mediated, raise challenges in the understanding, operationalisation and measurement of these complex relationships. There is an urgent need for exploratory research to assess potential links between climate change and mental health; and to progress the field through proposing evidence-informed scales and measurements of mental health impacts in the face of climate change. Current discussions on appropriate climate change related mental health indicators are deficit focused, with suicide rates proposed as the potential indicator. To adequately assess the impact of climate change on mental health, a more comprehensive conceptualisation of mental health and imagining of appropriate measurement tools is required.

This project will use existing data sources (such as national surveys) to explore trends in climate change related mental health illnesses, inequalities and resiliencies across geography, class and wealth. Population data from Australia and the United Kingdom will be explored with particular focus given to data representing communities vulnerable in both environmental and health terms, such as Indigenous, rural, remote and socio-economically deprived communities and young people. This exploration will shed light on the links between climate change and mental health and provide insight on practical and appropriate indicators for adequately assessing this relationship.

The candidate:

We are seeking a candidate who has an excellent academic record and a particular interest and commitment in conducting high quality research to improve health. A social science or environment and health background is desirable, but not essential. Domestic and international candidates are eligible to apply. Tuition fees are covered in the scholarship. The successful candidate will spend at least one year of their candidature at the [European Centre for Environment and Human Health](#) at the University of Exeter Medical School in Cornwall, England.

Achievable Outcomes:

- A PhD from The University of Queensland and the University of Exeter in a relevant field
- Experience working within an interdisciplinary team of researchers
- Experience with oral/written presentations at national/international conferences
- Scientific papers in high impact research journals
- Experience living and conducting research in different countries and culture