



# CONFLICT, CLIMATE AND MENTAL HEALTH: INTERCONNECTED CRISES

## As part of the Hub Communities' annual theme 2024: Global Health in Conflict Settings

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### INTRODUCTION



Climate change is contributing to **conflicts and fragile environments**, and **conflict** can contribute to **climate change** and reduce climate resilience. Following a **biopsychosocial systemic model**, physical health, mental health and social well-being are equally threatened by conflict and climate impacts.

- Conflicts/wars have tremendous impact on mental health, e.g., by causing impending deaths, loss of relatives, displacement, insecurity, reduced resilience.
- Similarly, climate change is a serious threat to mental health via extreme heat, extreme weather events, air pollution, infectious diseases, amongst others.

### BEST PRACTICES, INNOVATIONS & LESSONS LEARNED

#### The Impact of Conflict on Mental Health

The current war in **Lebanon** and years of political unrest:

- According to the International Organization for Migration, 1 million people have been affected by the conflict; 541,527 internally displaced.
- Adding to that, the Beirut port blast, COVID-19, and the Syrian refugee crisis have all increased the demand for mental health support.
- Mental health resources in Lebanon are constrained despite this high need.
- Stigma remains a main challenge, as well as lack of budgets and the overstretching of the health system.

**Germany: Policy Paper of the GHG Community on Global Mental Health;** Raising awareness of the importance of mental health at the climate-health nexus in policy making [3].

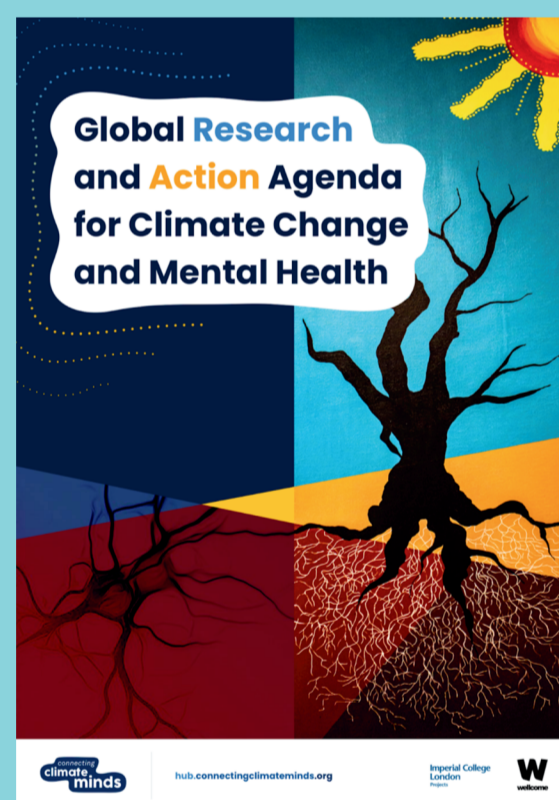


In **Ukraine**, the ongoing conflict has led to a substantial rise in mental health disorders:

- An increased prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety significantly impacts the quality of life for affected populations [1].
- The country's healthcare system is under severe strain due to a surge in patients seeking both physical and psychological care amid continuous hostilities [2].
- This burden is further compounded as critical healthcare infrastructure has been directly targeted, reducing the system's capacity to deliver essential services.

#### The Impact of Climate Change on Mental Health

**Marginalised groups:** For women, climate change can be a major stress factor that leads to negative effects on pregnancy and child development. **People with existing mental health impairments** are particularly vulnerable due to potential disruptions in clinical or nursing care, such as during a pandemic or after a flood. This impact is exacerbated, e.g., by lack of/ insufficient government support, access to resources, community preparedness, sense of community, and mental health literacy [3].



#### Global: Connecting Climate Minds

- Global research and action agenda informed by 1000 experts in 90+ countries. Understanding compounding and complex interplay between conflict, climate and other mental health stressors is a global research priority.
- Gathered lived experience stories and case studies highlighting impact of climate and conflict on mental health and responses [4].

### CONCLUSIONS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflict and climate change can exacerbate each other and are **both drivers of poor mental health and inequity** [5]. **There is a need to:**

- **Raise public awareness** and knowledge of the impacts of conflict and climate change on mental health, offer training and education
- **Strengthen individual and community resilience:** Action is needed at community level with those affected by conflict, climate change, and mental health being empowered to drive change and take action
- **Ensure sustainable assistance:** With 3.6 billion people already living in high-risk areas [6], we need long term local support schemes for global problems
- **Strengthen transdisciplinary thinking, collaboration, and research** on linking conflict, climate change, and poor mental health [3,4]: Actors across sectors need to integrate their practice areas, and call for addressing the root causes of conflict and climate crises [4,7]
- **Embed mental health in climate** protection and adaptation plans, disaster risk and response management
- **Consider climate and conflict-specific mental health stressors** in the planning of future health care

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