

Primus Partner Report

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Climate-Induced Mental Health Issues Among Youth Cost India USD 13.7 Billion Annually, Says Report



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Article Content:

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Climate change is not just an environmental crisis—it is emerging as a significant mental health challenge, particularly for young people. A new study by Primus Partners, titled “The Cost of Climate Change: Young Voices in a Warming World”, highlights the economic and psychological toll of climate-induced anxiety and stress among individuals aged 15-24, estimating an annual GDP loss of USD 13.7 billion.

The study found that 26 per cent of young people in this age group experience anxiety and stress due to climate change. Among the 46 per cent who report mental health issues linked to climate concerns, only 33 per cent are aware of available support services.

The economic implications are substantial, with climate-induced mental health struggles in this demographic potentially leading to an annual financial loss of 0.35 per cent of India’s GDP. This figure is part of a broader 6 per cent GDP reduction associated with climate-related health complications.

The mental health consequences of climate change extend beyond India. The World Health Organization (WHO) has projected that extreme weather events could contribute to an additional 250,000 deaths annually between 2030 and 2050. Similarly, a 2020 study by the Royal College of Psychiatrists found that 60 per cent of child and adolescent psychiatrists in the UK’s NHS had encountered patients distressed by environmental concerns.

In India, awareness levels are high—56 per cent of individuals aged 15-18 and 60 per cent of those aged 19-24 recognise the mental health impact of climate change, with 39 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively, feeling its significant effects on their well-being.

Dr. Naveen Kumar, Head of Community Psychiatry at NIMHANS, emphasised the need for integrating mental health support with climate resilience strategies. “Policies need to integrate mental health support with climate resilience strategies, particularly for children and adolescents. This could involve integrating climate-change education in school curricula, developing targeted psychosocial support

services, and ensuring that disaster response mechanisms are child-sensitive," he said.

The report outlines key policy recommendations, including:

- Integrating climate-related mental health strategies into the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP).
- Training school counselors to address climate change-induced psychological stress and establishing referral mechanisms.
- Enhancing outreach for mental health services through government-led campaigns involving Community Health Officers (CHOs), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), along with strengthening Tele-MANAS.

Prof. Dr. Sanjay Zodpey, President of PHFI, stated, "Through a multidisciplinary lens, this document delves into the scientific, psychological, and policy dimensions of climate-induced mental health challenges."

Nilaya Varma, Co-Founder & CEO of Primus Partners, highlighted the need for further research and policy development. "The findings highlight the urgent need for integrating mental health considerations into climate policies, ensuring that young people, who are among the most affected, have access to adequate support mechanisms. By strengthening outreach, enhancing awareness, and embedding climate resilience into public health strategies, we can take proactive steps toward mitigating the long-term socio-economic consequences of climate-induced mental health challenges."

Adding another dimension to the study, Vivek Tandon, VP of Health Practice at Primus Partners, noted the gender disparity in climate-induced mental health impacts. "The study sheds light on the disproportionate effect of climate change on gender, with more females reporting its impact than men. This paves the path for further research on this from a gender lens," Vivek said.

As India grapples with the growing threat of climate change, urgent action is needed to mitigate its mental health impact on youth and integrate climate resilience into national mental health strategies