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Climate Change – A monumental risk to Pakistani health.

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Climate change is one of the greatest threats to the world's population. Rising global temperature is a significant aspect of climate change. The evidence is clear: a temperature rise of 1.5°C greater than pre-industrial levels poses a grave threat to human health, which will be incredibly hard to reverse.[1]

Global warming leads to an increased incidence of heat-related, vector- borne illnesses and vastly increases cardiovascular and respiratory morbidity and mortality, along with adverse effects on mental health.[2] The World Health Organization (WHO) published a report quantitatively assessing the effects of climate change on specific causes of death.[3] It conservatively estimated that 250,000 mortalities could occur every year due to climate change attributable heat-related illnesses, diarrheal illnesses, malaria, and dengue. In this publication, WHO stated that climate change induced heat-related deaths in South Asia could amount to 21,648 in 2030 and 62,821 by 2050. WHO also shed light upon climate change induced deaths due to diarrheal illness (base case scenario reported 170,817 deaths in children < 15 years of age in 2030) and the population at risk of contracting the dengue virus in our region. In South Asia, the number of individuals at risk of contracting the dengue virus could increase to 1.67 billion by 2030. Wondmagegn et al. showed that morbidity due to climate change would contribute to more frequent hospital admissions, prolonged hospital stays, and increased healthcare costs.[4]

Even though climate change is a grave challenge faced by humankind, it does not affect all populations equally. Unfortunately, Pakistan ranks at 8th position in the top 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change; thus, the Pakistani population will be among the few nations to be affected especially hard by this predicament.[5] This means that morbidity and mortality attributable to climate change as discussed previously is highly relevant to the Pakistani population. Health professionals can play an important role in mitigating the effects of climate change. They must campaign for policy change and train colleagues to inform the general public to put pressure on the government to take significant action in preparing for climate change. Research is required to identify the Pakistani communities and demographics most sensitive to climate change, and to devise solutions at a community level. To summarize, climate change is a significant hazard to the health of the Pakistani population and steps must be taken to prepare our significantly lacking healthcare infrastructure for the upcoming challenge.

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