

Defining Climate Justice in Nursing for Public and Planetary Health

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Climate justice is key to protecting public health in climate change. The United Nations describes immediate threats and unjust harms for people and ecosystems resulting from a rise in global temperature.¹ As public health nurses (PHNs) and representatives of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments' Global Climate Justice in Nursing Steering Committee,² we believe that PHNs are uniquely positioned to address climate injustices in partnership with communities and ecosystems. The purpose of this editorial is to propose a definition of climate justice in nursing. To support the development of this definition, the following sections briefly explore (1) the climate justice movement, (2) climate justice frameworks, (3) a definition of climate justice in nursing, and (4) implications for nursing roles in climate justice through research, education, advocacy, and practice.

THE CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Climate change intensifies health burdens caused by environmental racism, which has impacted Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color for

centuries through overexposure to polluted and risky geographies.^{3,4} These communities are sometimes referred to as “frontline” or “fenceline communities.” Frontline communities are those that are often the first to experience the impacts of climate change and whose members have important insights and skills in coping and policy solutions.³ Fenceline communities are groups living close enough to an industrial or toxic environment to experience harm from the associated pollution and are at elevated risk for further harm from climate events.⁴

The concept of climate justice was created as a submovement of the environmental justice movement to redefine climate change as a human rights and environmental justice issue.³ Public health equity is intrinsic to the vision that grassroots leaders advanced in the 1991 Principles of Environmental Justice.⁵ Formal climate justice principles were published in 2002 for the Earth Summit in Bali,³ and policy recommendations were published that same year at the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit.⁶ Further recommendations were put forth at the national Mobilization for Climate Justice when a climate justice

community delegation attended the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.⁷ The climate justice movement continues to evolve and strengthen.

CLIMATE JUSTICE FRAMEWORKS

In the following subsections, we consider three frameworks that provide elements important to defining climate justice in nursing, including the Just Transition Framework, the Planetary Health Education Framework, and the Critical Environmental Justice Nursing for Planetary Health Framework.

Just Transition Framework

The Just Transition Alliance, formed in 1997, created principles for a transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.⁸ The Climate Justice Alliance adapted the Just Transition Alliance's principles into a Just Transition Framework.⁹ The Just Transition Framework is applied by the Climate Justice Alliance to respond to escalating climate disasters in the United States, where they provide technical training and capacity building for frontline communities. The framework guides strategies that are rooted in the work of environmental justice groups and labor unions, in alliance with fenceline and frontline communities, to define a transition away from polluting industries that are harming workers, public health, and the planet. Thus, planetary health is regarded as integral to this transition.

Planetary Health Education Framework

The Planetary Health Education Framework highlights the interconnectedness

between Earth's natural systems and the health of all forms of life and considers the geographical and temporal distribution of social, environmental, distributive, intergenerational, and multispecies justice issues.¹⁰ "Multispecies justice" is a term that expands the idea and practice of justice to encompass and respond to the destruction of multispecies lifeways, advances the rights of Nature, and rejects the idea of human exceptionalism.¹¹ The framework supports learners by equipping and enabling them with the necessary knowledge, skills, literacy, values, and attitudes to drive transdisciplinary and mutually reinforcing actions that protect and restore planetary health. It calls for the elimination of systemic inequities and acknowledgment of how historical, political, and geographical injustices have disenfranchised populations and degraded ecosystems.

Critical Environmental Justice Nursing for Planetary Health Framework

The Critical Environmental Justice Nursing for Planetary Health Framework describes how planetary health injustices have been fueled by supremacy (e.g., White, male, human) and capitalism for centuries, guaranteeing disadvantages for all but a few and creating the illusion of scarcity to justify extraction.¹² This framework conceptualizes the human roots in planetary health, expressed as patterns of violence (e.g., slavery, ecocide, femicide, and genocide) that are manifested in patterns of public health (e.g., despair, morbidity, and mortality). Thus, patterns of domination (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and speciesism) overlap and mutually reinforce these injustices.

The framework calls for a radical shift toward worldviews and ways of knowing that embrace regeneration and transformation of existing power relationships for health.

DEFINING CLIMATE JUSTICE IN NURSING

Climate justice has become a driving force for innovation in science and is at the forefront of the planetary health and environmental justice movements; yet, it has not been formally defined in relation to nursing. We used the previously described principles and frameworks to guide the development of an initial definition of climate justice in nursing to help inform climate justice strategies in public health nursing research, education, advocacy, and practice:

Climate justice in nursing addresses the social, racial, economic, environmental, and multispecies justice issues of the climate crisis through centering the experiences and ways of knowing in frontline and fenceline communities and safeguarding the rights of Nature to achieve planetary health.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVANCING CLIMATE JUSTICE

PHN research in climate justice has only recently emerged but is grounded in environmental justice and planetary health. PHN researchers are using critical methodologies for transforming power relationships in the context of planetary health.¹² PHNs need to develop new interventions and case studies for ecological mitigation, restoration, and regeneration to advance

multispecies justice and improve public health.

As climate injustices increase, PHNs will need to be prepared in the science and practice of planetary health to better understand how to protect the environments that people and multispecies communities live in. The interconnection of public and planetary health should be considered a critical global component of PHN education and the PHN standards of practice. Planetary health pedagogical frameworks that promote justice provide new opportunities for expansion into regenerative worldviews and ways of knowing.^{3,12}

Just as PHNs need new orientation to knowledge, policy solutions for climate justice must be centered within the ways of knowing, needs, and experiences of frontline and fenceline communities and ecosystems. PHNs design and implement public health policies to promote population health equity. Continued development of this definition of climate justice in nursing will further clarify and accelerate our policy work. Meaningful inclusion and input are critical to ensuring policy solutions provide benefits for communities and ecosystems.

Many climate-affected communities are leading the way in developing solutions to the climate crisis.² Through the formation of transdisciplinary and nurse–community partnerships, PHNs can support community-led interventions and be responsive to the interconnectedness of climate injustices to improve public health. As the definition of climate justice in nursing is used and informed by nurse partnerships with communities and ecosystems, we anticipate that the definition will evolve and inform future global nursing work to advance climate justice.

CONCLUSION

The climate crisis is an immediate public health threat. Climate justice is central to restoring planetary health and rights for all life. We welcome critical discourse to catalyze PHN action in advancing climate justice through community and ecosystem partnerships.

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CONTRIBUTORS

J. LeClair led the conceptualization of the Climate Justice in Nursing definition and manuscript development. All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, writing, and revisions of the editorial.

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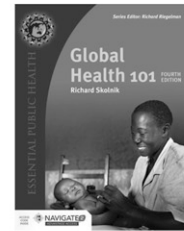
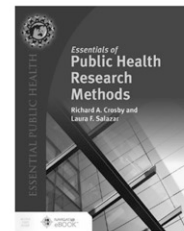
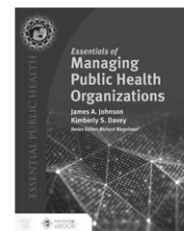
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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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