

Public Expectations for Health Professionals in Planetary Health Education



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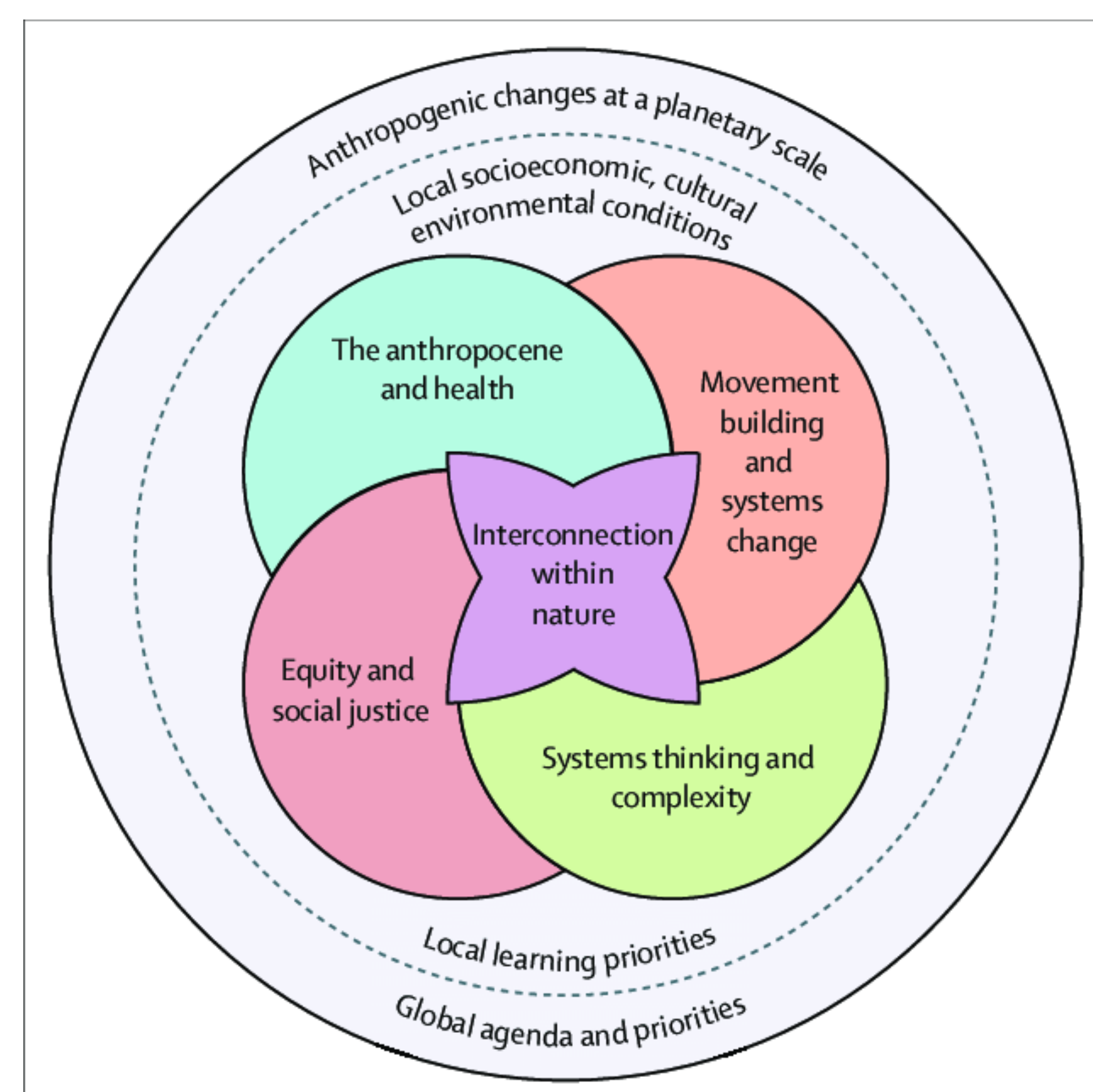
Background

- As climate change accelerates, it increasingly has a negative impact on health outcomes ranging from heat-related illnesses and respiratory distress to mental health challenges and vector-borne diseases.
- A significant majority of the public already observes these impacts in their daily lives.
- Despite the awareness of climate-related health effects, lack of knowledge about specific harms posed by climate change persists.

Purpose

- Learn the specific attitudes and beliefs that the public holds regarding the influence of the environment on human health.
- Explore public expectations for the role of health professionals in key areas: planetary health advocacy and clinical practice.
- Help the academic community develop better strategies for supporting long-term planetary and human health.

Theoretical Framework



Sample Description

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Female	59	66.3
Male	29	32.6
Non-binary	1	1.1
Occupation		
Full-time employment	41	46.1
Part-time employment	7	7.9
Student	31	34.8
Retired	6	6.7
Educational Attainment		
High school degree	9	10.1
Some college	34	38.2
College	22	24.7
Graduate	22	24.7

Results: Public Expectations for Health Professions

Participants reported high agreement with the following statements:

- Health professionals have a responsibility to bring climate-health effects to the attention of the public (88.1%).
- Professional organizations should have a significant advocacy role regarding climate change (86.9%).
- Health professionals should have a significant advocacy role regarding climate change (86.9%).
- Leading sustainability efforts in offices, clinics, and hospitals (85.7%).
- Teaching about environment and health impacts should be part of health professions education (84.5%).
- Responsibility to discuss climate-health effects directly with patients (78.6%).

Methods

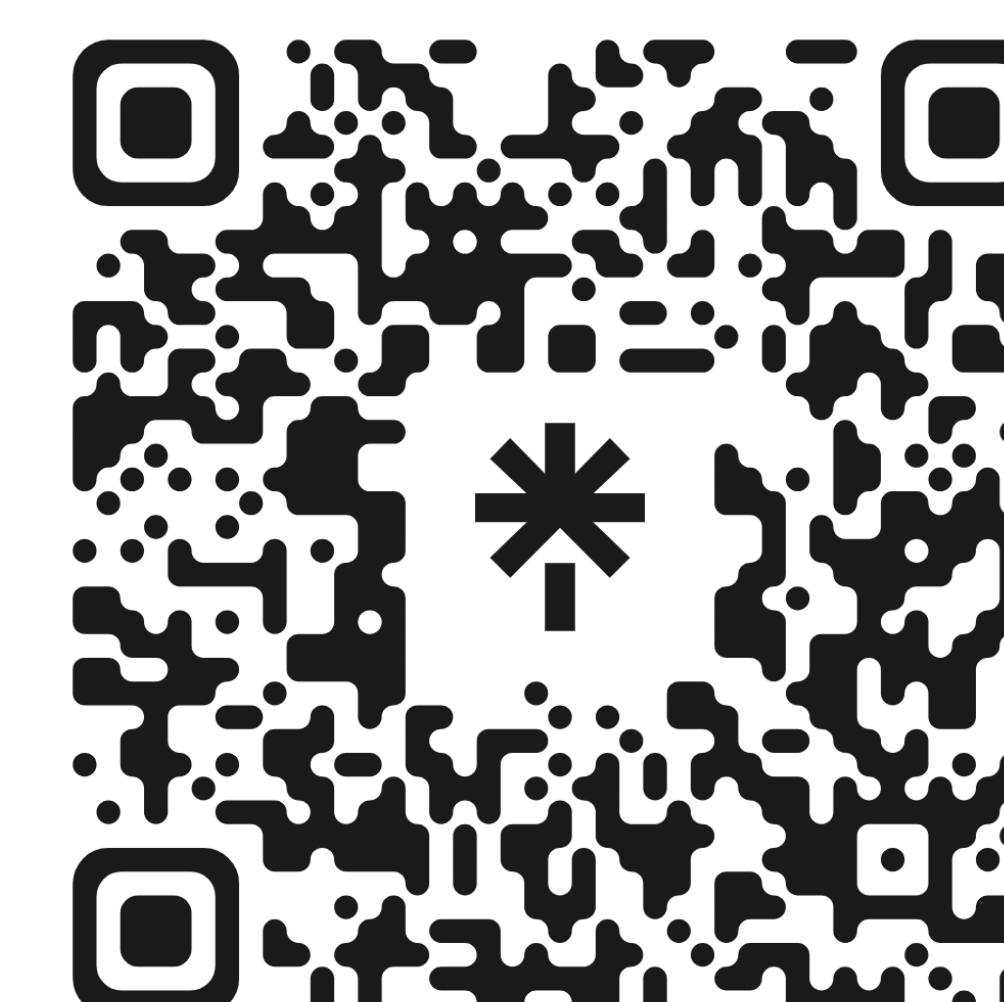
- Utilized a cross-sectional survey design to assess public attitudes toward planetary health (n = 85).
- Participants were recruited from community service events, coalition meetings, and through information posted on research-affiliated websites.
- Data were collected using a set of questions including a demographic questionnaire, the Revised New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale to measure pro-environmental worldviews, and questions measuring public expectations for medical professionals and perceptions of climate-health impacts.
- Surveys were administered anonymously via the Qualtrics online platform and required approximately 15 minutes to complete.
- Upon completion, participants were eligible to receive a \$5 digital gift card as compensation for their time.

Results: Planetary Health Impacts

Participants reported noticing:

- Increased Allergy-Related Symptoms: 70.2%
- Injuries from Severe Weather (storms, floods, fires): 64.3%
- Heat-Related Illnesses: 57.1%
- Air Pollution-Related Illness Severity: 53.6%

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Discussion

- Strong agreement for health professionals as vital trusted sources of information for environmental health.
- Overwhelming support for public outreach and organizational advocacy suggest a clear expectation for health professionals beyond traditional clinical roles.

Limitations

- Selection Bias: Participants were recruited from community service events.
- Demographic Representation: The sample was predominantly female and highly educated.
- Self-report bias: Subject to social desirability bias.

Implications

- Given high visibility of symptoms, health providers have opportunity to integrate environmental health counseling into routine patient care.
- Explore ways to raise public awareness of the health-related effects of climate change.

Conclusion

- These findings underscore the value of investing in planetary health education for health professions education.
- Opportunities for interprofessional education and research are clear.
- Advocacy is an important role for all health professionals and may make an impact on climate resilience actions by leadership across institutions.