

Spark up a Conversation with Us: How Wildfire Season Impacts Mental and Physical Health

Alexandra Ferraro & Amie Spiers
4th Year BSN, University of Victoria in
Partnership with Selkirk College

We would like to acknowledge our field guide Laura Nessman and our instructor Shannon Shah for their guidance and support.

Introduction/Background

- Wildfires are increasingly destroying more area in the Central Kootenays each year.
- Ecological grief is a common response to the loss of the environment.
- Wildfires and environmental loss impacts mental and physical health in many ways.
- As the Central Kootenays continue to be impacted by wildfires and climate change, Selkirk College wishes to learn how to better support staff and students.

Smoke in
Alberta From
BC fires:
Carilyn Briscoe
(2020)

Objectives

- Identify current support limitations.
- Research the impact wildfires and climate change have on mental and physical health.
- Organize a virtual Dinner Basket conversation with staff and students at Selkirk College to learn personal impacts of wildfires.
- Utilize current research and literature to present suggestions to improve current supports.

Moyie Lake :
Amie Spiers
(2017)

Literature Review Summary

- Physical/mental health is negatively impacted by fire season.
- Climate change and global warming is increasing wildfires.
- Loss of land affecting mental health.
- Correlations between mental and physical health impacts.
- Increased risk of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and substance use after being a part of a wildfire disaster.

Issues

- The Kootenays have experienced an increase in wildfires and climate change recently.
- Climate anxiety and ecological grief are growing mental health concerns.
- Negative physical health impacts that arise during wildfire season are felt by many.
- A lack of resources available to deal with physical and mental health issues.

Woodbury creek fire: Katelyn Hurley (2020)

Woodbury valley: Dave McCormick (2020)

Recommendations

- Ensure counselor awareness of ecological grief.
- Increase of mental health supports offered.
- Group meetings and seminars that provide mental health tips and to discuss ecological grief and climate change.
- Ensure students have access to counseling services.
- Utilize telehealth and online at home resources to maintain/improve physical health.