

The Impacts of Climate Change on the Daily Lives of Individuals with Disabilities: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Climate change affects every aspect of our lives, and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable. Despite people with disabilities being more directly and indirectly exposed to and affected by the impact of climate change than the rest, research on their unique challenges remains lacking. To date, most research has focused on the occurrence of emergencies such as natural disasters, and there is little research on the effects of climate change on daily life.

This study addresses this gap by conducting a scoping review of research on how climate change affects the daily lives of people with disabilities. Relevant studies were identified from Web of Science, PubMed, and Scopus, with a final selection of 17 articles for review.

The results of the scoping review showed that climate change affects the physical and mental health of people with disabilities and also affects their mobility in daily life. In addition, climate change is expected to increase the frequency of migrations. Consequently, people with disabilities, many of whom are already socially marginalized, are likely to be disproportionately affected and face further disadvantages as climate change progresses.

Keywords: Climate Change, Vulnerability, People with Disabilities, Daily Life

알기 쉬운 요약

이 연구는 왜 했을까? 기후변화는 우리의 일상을 송두리째 바꿔놓을 것이고 장애인은 이러한 변화에 더 취약하다. 하지만 기후변화가 장애인의 일상에 미치는 영향에 대한 연구는 거의 없다. 그래서 이 연구는 Scoping review를 통해 관련 연구가 많지 않은 연구 지평을 보여주고 더 많은 연구가 필요하다는 것을 이야기하고 있다.

새롭게 밝혀진 내용은? Scoping review 결과 17개의 연구가 선정되었고, 기후변화는 장애인이 육체적 건강과 신체적 건강에 영향을 미치고 이로 인해 사회적 불평등이 더 심화될 것이라는 것을 알 수 있다.

앞으로 무엇을 해야 하나? 기후변화는 다양한 직간접적 경로를 통해 장애인의 일상에 영향을 미칠 수 있다. 이와 같은 다양한 영향을 실증적으로 분석하고 그 영향을 계량화할 수 있는 추가적 연구가 필요하다.

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I. Introduction

Climate change affects all aspects of our lives. Beyond the frequent and intensified occurrence of natural disasters and extreme weather events, the consequences of climate change threaten our daily lives. Weather patterns are shifting from what we are accustomed to, frozen territories are melting, and human and animal habitats are overlapping, resulting in a greater prevalence of transmissible diseases. Some individuals may need to relocate due to increased climate risks. Additionally, as economies and societies adjust to cope with climate change, everyone's daily lives are being altered. However, the burdens are not evenly distributed.

People with disabilities are more vulnerable to climate change. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) recognizes that individuals with disabilities experience the impacts of climate change more severely (UNHCR, 2020). They may face additional challenges during evacuations in natural disasters caused by climate change. Economic and social instabilities further threaten the daily lives of disabled people, resulting in increased marginalization (UNHCR, 2020).

Despite the greater risks for the disabled population, only a few studies investigate the impacts of climate change on disabled individuals (Gaskin et al., 2017). Most existing literature focuses on natural disasters, highlighting the disproportionate impacts on disabled people during such events (Lindsay et al., 2023). However, other aspects of climate change that affect daily lives must also be investigated. Although the impact of a single day may be minuscule, the cumulative effect of daily disruptions can become significant over time. Neglecting these impacts underestimates the total effects of climate change. There is a clear need for more studies on how climate change affects the daily lives of people with disabilities.

This paper aims to highlight the daily impacts of climate change on disabled individuals and identify the knowledge gaps. A scoping review is useful for examining emerging topics with limited previous studies and identifying research gaps (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Tricco et al., 2016). Therefore, this paper conducts a scoping review to synthesize evidence and conceptualize the daily impacts of climate change on disabled individuals.

II. Methods

1. Search strategy

This paper reviewed articles following the scoping review guidelines in the JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis (2024). The electronic databases used were Web of Science, PubMed, and Scopus. The search terms included "climate," "change," and "disab*."

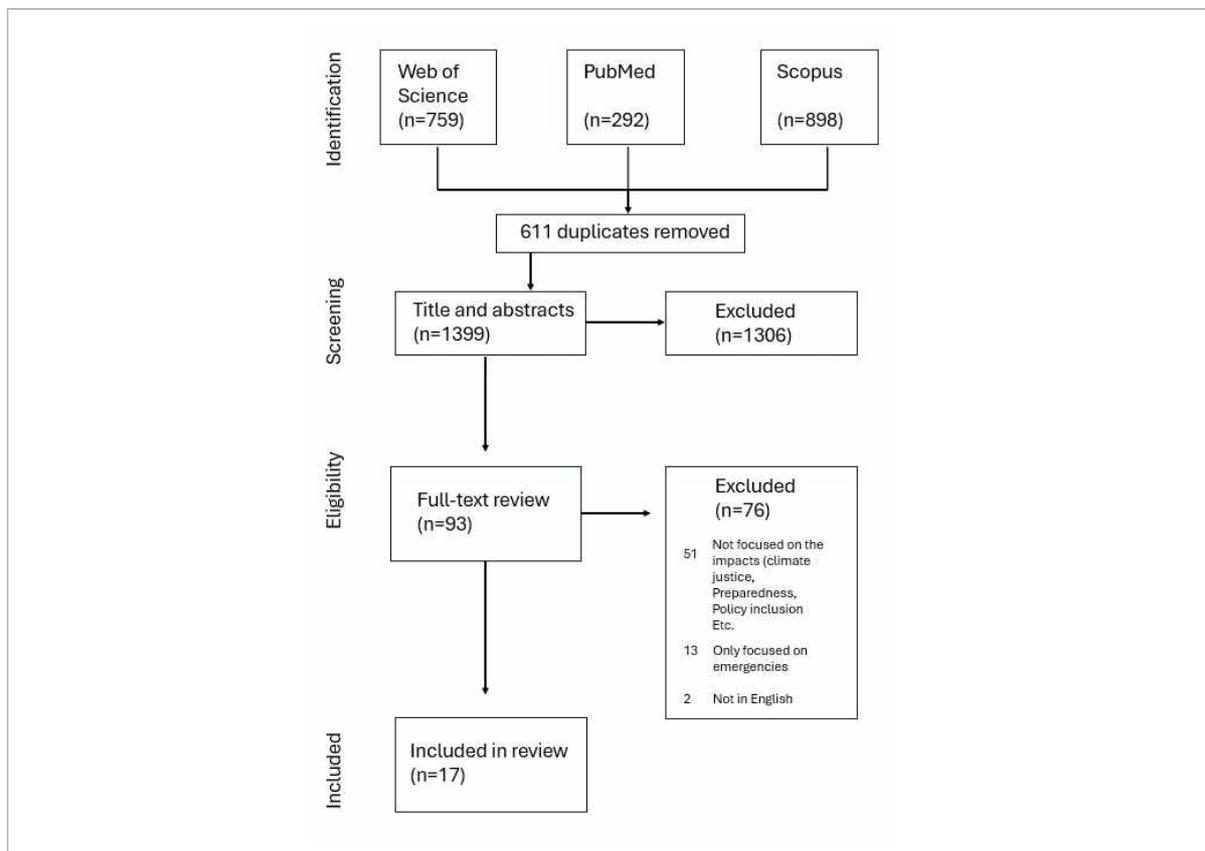
2. Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Since the objective of this paper is to investigate the daily impacts of climate change on disabled individuals, only research specifically involving disabled people was included. Research on people with chronic illnesses

was also included. Although there are controversies about whether people with chronic illnesses should be classified as disabled, Wendell (2001) argued for their inclusion. Therefore, this paper includes literature on the impacts of climate change on people with chronic illnesses.

Scoping reviews are conducted to provide an overview of evidence, and unlike systematic reviews, they may include meta-analyses and comments (Peters et al., 2024). Consequently, this paper includes meta-analyses and comments. The literature focusing solely on emergency impacts or calling for policy interventions without investigating effects was excluded. While the existence of comparison with non-disabled people is desirable, this paper includes studies both with and without comparisons. Articles in languages other than English were excluded, and there were no restrictions regarding the year of publication. The search was current as of May 27, 2024.

Figure 1. Overview of the search process



III. Results

1. Summary of included papers

Seventeen papers were included in this scoping review. The majority of these papers focused on the impacts of climate change on health. Beyond the meta-analyses, only a few studies explored other dimensions: one

paper examined the influence on daily commuting patterns, another investigated the effects on migration, one focused on work and economic conditions, and another analyzed disaster recovery. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the included papers.

Table 1. List of included papers – country, sample, outcome variable

Author (year)	Country	Sample	Outcome variable
Bass et al. (2024)	US	spinal cord injury survivors (n=27), care givers (n=11), and general public (n=27)	commute and transport
Buizza et al. (2022)	Italy	Parkinson's Disease patients	Parkinson's Disease patients' indices
Stella et al. (2021)	-	-	review
Flores et al. (2020)	US	victims of Hurricane Harvey Random sample (n=403)	Physical health problems, PTS, lack of access to health care
Gaskin et al. (2017)	-	34 papers	review
Greenwald et al. (2024)	-	-	review
Islam & Shamsuddoha (2017)	Bangladesh	people living in agro-ecological zones and disaster affected zones	impacts of disasters and displacement
Jodoin et al. (2020)	-	-	review
Kim et al. (2023)	Korea	National Health Insurance Sample cohort	hospitalization rate
Kosanic et al. (2022)	-	21 papers	review
Mann et al. (2021)	-	67 papers	review
Ngcamu (2023)	-	23 papers	review
Park et al. (2024)	Korea	people with intellectual disability, autism, and mental disorders (n=456,946)	Emergency department admission rate
Pirmasari & McQuaid (2023)	Indonesia	marginalized urban communities	impacts of climate change
Ruxin et al. (2024)	-	-	review
Vig & Dwivedi (2023)	-	-	review
Zha et al. (2022)	China	suburban farmers (n=25,984)	hospital admission rates

Table 2. List of included papers – methodology, findings

Author (year)	Methodology	Findings
Bass et al. (2024)	observational, descriptive, cross-sectional	climate change affects commuting of PwD,
Buizza et al. (2022)	empirical study, secondary data	climate change increased health issues in Parkinson's Disease patients
Stella et al. (2021)	descriptive paper	self-isolate may affect neurology patients disproportionately
Flores et al. (2020)	qualitative, structured survey data	healthcare access was constrained due to climate change
Gaskin et al. (2017)	meta-analysis	climate change affects disabled people disproportionately
Greenwald et al. (2024)	descriptive paper	climate change can exacerbate health inequalities
Islam & Shamsuddoha (2017)	qualitative research design, interviews	migration had long-term negative consequences for people with disabilities
Jodoin et al. (2020)	descriptive paper	climate change affects disabled individual's health, work, and economic conditions
Kim et al. (2023)	empirical study, secondary data	non-optimal temperature adversely affects people with disabilities more

Author (year)	Methodology	Findings
Kosanic et al. (2022)	meta-analysis	climate change affects disabled people disproportionately
Mann et al. (2021)	meta-analysis	more adverse effects on mental health, less recovery support
Ngcamu (2023)	meta-analysis	climate change affects disabled people in the global south disproportionately
Park et al. (2024)	empirical study, secondary data	people with intellectual disabilities are more susceptible to heat
Pirmasari & McQuaid (2023)	participants observation, in-depth interviews	low capacity to recover due to the intersection of disability and poverty
Ruxin et al. (2024)	descriptive paper	people with disabilities are affected by heat, cold, power outages
Vig & Dwivedi (2023)	qualitative approach	climate change can affect mental health of disabled individuals
Zha et al. (2022)	empirical study, secondary data	Sudden temperature change affects people with cardiovascular disease

2. Daily impacts of climate change on people with disabilities

Several studies have highlighted the adverse impacts of climate change on disabled individuals, with heat being the most frequently cited factor (Ruxin et al., 2024; Gaskin et al., 2017; Greenwald et al., 2024; Kosanic et al., 2022; Buizza et al., 2022; Park et al., 2024). Buizza et al. (2022) reported that high temperatures are linked to significant variations in epidemiological indices among Parkinson's Disease patients. Not only do extreme heat events pose a risk, but even slight deviations from average temperatures can adversely affect people with disabilities. For instance, Park et al. (2024) found that emergency department admissions for individuals with intellectual disabilities increase during periods of heat. Similarly, Kim et al. (2023) and Zha et al. (2022) demonstrated that non-optimal temperatures negatively impact the cardiovascular health of disabled individuals.

Disabled individuals are also more vulnerable to the mental health impacts of climate change. Those who have experienced natural disasters and emergency evacuations are at an increased risk of developing mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Vig & Dwivedi, 2023). The heightened state of risk can further exacerbate mental health challenges. As the frequency and intensity of natural disasters increase due to climate change, disabled individuals are disproportionately affected, leading to a greater risk of mental health issues (Vig & Dwivedi, 2023).

Additionally, the social instability caused by climate change impacts the mental well-being of disabled individuals. Climate change can lead to a variety of social instabilities, including food shortages, displacement, and social isolation, all of which have detrimental effects on the mental health of people with disabilities (Vig & Dwivedi, 2023).

Climate change also impacts the mobility of disabled individuals. While unfavorable weather conditions restrict the mobility of all people, the limitations are more pronounced for those with disabilities. Bass et al. (2024) conducted a survey among 27 spinal cord injury (SCI) survivors, 11 caregivers, and 27 members of the general public to examine the effects of extreme weather conditions on commuting patterns and healthcare appointment attendance. The study found that extreme heat and heavy rain led individuals with SCI to reschedule appointments more frequently than their non-injured counterparts. Additionally, flooding had a

significant impact on the commute patterns of people with SCI compared to others.

Beyond direct health and mobility effects, climate change also has indirect impacts on disabled individuals. The resulting social instabilities, such as increased displacement and migration, can be particularly stressful. Islam and Shamsuddoha (2017) studied the effects of fast and slow-onset disasters in Bangladesh through qualitative research, including interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies. They found that rapid-onset disasters often lead to mass migration, while slow-onset disasters typically result in routine economic migration initially, eventually leading to permanent migration. The study also revealed that while the negative long-term effects of permanent migration are generally significant, the consequences are especially severe for people with disabilities.

In the face of social and economic instabilities exacerbated by climate change, people with disabilities may experience further marginalization. Greenwald et al. (2024) explored how individuals with post-stroke aphasia intersect with climate change. Through a literature review, they confirmed that disabled individuals, particularly when intersecting with factors like gender and poverty, are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, thereby exacerbating disparities. Similarly, Mann et al. (2021) conducted a scoping review to explore the impacts of disaster exposure on children and adolescents with disabilities. They found that families with disabled children are more likely to be exposed to disasters, less prepared for such events, and less likely to receive adequate recovery support.

IV. Discussion

While the vulnerability of disabled individuals is recognized, there is insufficient supporting evidence. This scoping review reveals a significant research gap in understanding the daily impacts of climate change on disabled people. More rigorous investigations across diverse topics are required.

Climate change affects disabled people through both direct and indirect pathways (UNHCR, 2020). This paper highlights the heterogeneous impacts of climate change on disabled individuals via a scoping review. However, as demonstrated, the existing literature is sparse and does not fully address the wide range of potential impacts. Henceforth, this paper will exemplify some potential cases of climate change impacts on disabled individuals, emphasizing the need for further rigorous empirical investigations into these areas

First, the exacerbation of disparities could result from regressive climate policies. However, few papers explore how such policies might aggravate marginalization. In response to climate change, countries worldwide are implementing mitigation and adaptation strategies. However, these policies can sometimes have unintended consequences. As Henrique and Tschakert (2021) point out, some policies disproportionately benefit advantaged groups, exacerbating existing inequalities. This can leave marginalized populations, including people with disabilities, in a worse position. Electric vehicle subsidies exemplify this issue.

Several scholars argue that government subsidies for electric vehicles primarily benefit higher-income earners. Guo and Kontou (2021) studied the distributional fairness of California's electric vehicle rebate program, finding that high-income groups received the majority of benefits. This leaves less government funding available for programs directly aiding people with disabilities who may not be able to afford electric vehicles in the first

place.

However, the challenges for disabled people extend beyond affordability. Even if they can afford an electric vehicle, the lack of accessible infrastructure presents a significant hurdle. Hong (2023) highlights the critical shortage of charging stations designed for people with disabilities. Wheelchair users, for instance, require additional space to enter and exit vehicles comfortably, necessitating wider door openings. Additionally, charging handles should be positioned at a low height for easy access. As of December 2022, according to Hong's report, only 0.3% of Korea's 19,000 electric vehicle chargers met these disability-friendly criteria. While transitioning to electric vehicles can be a valuable climate adaptation strategy, the lack of supportive policies creates a barrier for disabled people, potentially leaving them at greater risk.

Second, job security is a crucial aspect of life. Nonetheless, few papers acknowledge that climate change could impact people with disabilities by affecting their job stability. Climate change poses a significant threat to economic stability. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) reports that natural disasters and reduced productivity can hinder economic growth. Furthermore, the inherent uncertainty surrounding climate change, characterized by future scenarios and projections, discourages investments by businesses (Dixit & Pindyck, 1994). This combination of economic recession and heightened uncertainty often leads to labor market downturns (Denis & Kannan, 2013; Pries, 2016).

Research suggests that people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by economic downturns. Kaye (2010) examined job losses during the 2007-2009 recession in the United States and found that workers with disabilities experienced higher job loss rates compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Similarly, a study by Jones et al. (2021) in the United Kingdom revealed that even when job losses were not prevalent, disabled workers faced harsher working conditions during the recession, including increased workload and reduced training opportunities.

While some might argue that legal protections safeguard job security for existing disabled workers, this argument has limitations. While protective laws may offer some security for employed individuals, they might also increase a company's perceived "option value" of hiring someone with a disability. This, in turn, could lead employers to be more hesitant to hire disabled workers in the first place. Consequently, job seekers with disabilities might face greater difficulty finding employment during economic downturns.

Third, climate change could disproportionately impact people with disabilities by hindering the accumulation of cognitive skills. Park et al. (2021) investigated the impact of hot days—defined as temperatures above 26.7°C—on pupils' learning abilities. They first utilized data from 58 countries to examine the relationship between hot days and test scores. In their international analysis, they discovered that one additional hot day before an exam decreased the test score by 0.18% of a standard deviation. However, this effect was more pronounced in less developed countries, indicating a heterogeneous impact. To further explore this heterogeneity, Park et al. (2021) analyzed U.S. data, where pupil characteristics could be more specifically identified. Their analysis showed that the impact was more significant for students attending schools in low-income districts. These results suggest that individuals with disabilities could also experience more significant impacts.

V. Conclusion

While the importance of addressing the impact of climate change on disabled people is increasingly recognized, existing research remains limited. Much of the current literature focuses on the vulnerability of disabled populations during natural disasters, neglecting the broader effects on daily life. This scoping review identified this gap and highlighted the need for further research.

Disability encompasses a wide range of experiences, and climate change manifests in diverse ways. This complex interplay creates numerous intersections that require investigation. Importantly, people with disabilities are the most vulnerable group to climate change. By addressing their specific needs and vulnerabilities, we can effectively enhance the resilience of society as a whole.

이성규는 서울대학교 환경대학원 박사과정에 재학 중이다. 환경경제학 분석 방법을 활용하여 기후변화가 취약계층에 미치는 영향에 대한 실증연구를 진행하고 있다.

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기후변화가 장애인의 일상에 미치는 영향: Scoping Review

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초록

기후변화는 우리 삶의 모든 영역에 영향을 미친다. 그리고 장애인은 기후변화의 영향에 더 취약하다. 장애인은 기후변화의 영향에 직간접적으로 노출되어 있고 누구보다 더 큰 영향을 받지만 이에 대한 연구는 미진하다. 현재까지의 연구는 자연재해와 같이 위급한 상황과 관련된 연구가 대부분이며 기후변화가 바꾸어놓을 일상생활에서 받게 될 영향에 대한 연구는 거의 없다.

이에 본 연구는 기후변화가 장애인의 일상생활에 미치는 연구에 대한 scoping review를 실시했다. Web of Science, PubMed, Scopus에서 기후변화로 인해 장애인이 일상에서 받는 영향에 대한 연구를 검색했고, 최종적으로 17개의 연구를 선정하여 이에 대한 리뷰를 실시하였다.

Scoping review 결과 기후변화는 장애인의 육체적 건강과 정신적 건강에 영향을 미치며 일상생활에서의 이동에도 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 기후변화로 인해 더 빈번해질 것으로 예상되는 이주의 경우에도 장애인은 더 큰 영향을 받게 될 것이며, 많은 수의 장애인이 사회적 소외계층이라는 특성이 더해져, 기후변화가 진행됨으로 인해 더 열악한 상황에 처하게 될 것이라는 것을 알 수 있다.

주요 용어: 기후변화, 취약성, 장애인, 일상에서의 영향