

# **Psychosocial Pathways Linking Identity Threat and Mental Health in Anthropogenically Disturbed Environments**

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## **Abstract**

Anthropogenically disturbed environments, including industrially polluted areas, contaminated communities, and remediation sites, represent not only environmental and public health challenges, but also psychologically meaningful contexts in which identity, belonging, and wellbeing may be disrupted. Although prior research has largely focused on exposure, toxicology, and epidemiology, the psychosocial pathways linking environmental burden to mental health remain conceptually fragmented. This scoping review synthesizes empirical literature on the relationships among place identity, identity threat, and mental wellbeing in environmentally burdened settings. Following PRISMA-ScR guidelines, the review included English-language peer-reviewed studies published between 1986 and 2025 and identified through searches in PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. The literature converged around four main themes: place stigma and identity devaluation; psychosocial effects of living with contamination; institutional and collective mechanisms that exacerbate or mitigate harm; and mental health outcomes with associated psychosocial pathways. Across studies, contamination emerged not only as a material hazard, but as a symbolic and relational threat that may weaken belonging, continuity, self-esteem, and perceived control. Commonly reported outcomes included chronic uncertainty, worry, distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced quality of life. These outcomes were often more closely linked to perceived risk, institutional mistrust, and loss of control than to objective exposure alone. The review underscores the importance of integrating environmental psychology, identity theory, and mental health research in order to better understand and support communities living in anthropogenically disturbed environments.



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