**The Double Edged Sword of Global Events: Creating Anxiety and Building Resilience**

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**Abstract**

Global crises such as war, pandemics, climate change, and economic instability have intensified anxiety worldwide. Those in direct exposure zones are not the only ones who risk being affected by mental illness. With increased technological innovations, stress can be spread easily through social media, news channels, and other forms of digital communication. Loss aversion only amplifies the psychological impact, contributing to risk-averse behavior and chronic stress. Anxiety manifests through both individual and collective experiences, which include fight-or-flight, post-traumatic stress, and collective trauma. Since anxiety is a factor that is expected, why not strengthen each other through resilience? Resilience—the ability to recover, adapt, and grow from hardship—can be developed through protective factors, coping strategies, community support, and post-traumatic growth. Displaced populations, though heavily impacted by crisis, demonstrate remarkable resilience in navigating new environments, cultures, and languages. Especially when external resources such as education, mental health care, and volunteer networks are able to support. Digital and in-person mental health programs that cover youth resilience education and community engagement are key to mitigate anxiety. Ultimately, anxiety can be a burden, but cultivating resilience at individual and societal levels allows communities to recover, adapt, and thrive. By prioritizing preparation, support systems, and global coordinated responses, societies can begin to transform the cycles of stress and loss into more opportunities for growth and collective strength.

*Keywords*: anxiety, resilience, community, global crises, mental health

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Approximately 30% of those affected by conflict and war, one in three asylum seekers, and nearly half of young adults experience anxiety or other mental challenges (Lim et al., 2022; Song & Teichholtz, 2020; Panchal et al, 2023). Even those far from conflict can be just impacted through social media and digital news exposure (Huntsman Mental Health Institute, 2022). Over the past eight months alone, wars, inflation, and worsening climate change have created ongoing instability (Mutamba, 2025, para. 1). Constant negative or even false news leaves many feeling as if they are living in a state of perpetual crisis. While global crises can foster resilience with access to coping resources and supportive networks, they also fuel chronic uncertainty.

The stigma surrounding mental health has existed for centuries (Farreras, 2025). Early explanations blamed supernatural forces, and later on, those struggling were hidden away from society shamefully (Farreras, 2025). Even today, despite widespread mental health awareness following the release of the iPhone (Gregersen, 2025), many still face social stigma and restricted access to care. Constant exposure to global crises through modern media significantly increases anxiety levels, particularly through loss aversion (Sediyama et al., 2020). Yet resilience can be strengthened through community-based mental health programs, proactive coping education, and digital therapy access.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety disorders are among the world’s most common mental disorders, with a 52% increase from 1990 to 2021 (Bie et al, 2024, section 3). It is often used casually to describe everyday stress or nervousness, but clinical anxiety can significantly disrupt daily life through persistent worry and symptoms such as insomnia, fatigue, tense muscles, and irritability (American Psychological Association, 2022). Global crises create prolonged and severe forms of anxiety, spreading it across groups through stress contagion, collective trauma, and loss aversion (Dimitroff et al., 2017; Hirschberger, 2018; Sediyama et al., 2020). Neurologically, the amygdala’s connection to the prefrontal cortex and ventral striatum are crucial to threat detection and emotional regulation (Xu et al., 2020). This helps explain why loss aversion—when pain from a loss is more impactful from an equivalent gain—is processed so strongly.

For vulnerable populations affected by wars and conflicts, anxiety manifests on a large scale through collective trauma (Hirschberger, 2018). The shared psychological wounds experienced by these communities are long-lasting. Refugees fleeing conflict not only face the constant threat of violence and displacement, but also a collective loss of identity and stability about their future stemming from loss aversion (Joseph & Borah, 2025; Sediyama et al., 2020). Living in a prolonged state of fight-or-flight contributes to high rates of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and physical illness (Skoog, 2023), and individuals prone to anxiety may become increasingly risk-averse after experiencing multiple losses (Xu et al., 2020).

Global pandemics like COVID-19 illustrate stress contagion on a massive scale. Loss aversion intensified anxiety as more people were exposed to death, stuck in isolation, or at risk of losing economic security (Sediyama et al., 2020; Ferrari et al., 2025). This bias helps explain behaviors such as panic-buying as people act irrationally to avoid the possibility of future scarcity (Omar et al., 2021). All the while, digital media continued to accelerate the pace at which fear spread. COVID-19 created a new technological age through increased digital connections that blurred the line between direct experience and distant observation. Buchanan (2023) found that “when speakers showed high cortisol responses, the observers also showed high responses”, demonstrating the heavy effects of stress observation in digital news. While some respond with empathy or survivor’s guilt, others become desensitized due to overexposure (New Dimensions Day Treatment Centers, 2024). Ultimately, the digital age has allowed anxiety to spread far beyond the crisis zone, triggering a wide range of behavioral and emotional responses.

**Resilience**

Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulty, and it is much more than simple ‘toughness’. (Yeo, 2020). It is a quality to thrive in the face of hardship, especially through protective factors, post-traumatic growth, learned optimism, and community resilience (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2016; Skoog, 2023; Moore, 2019; Patel et al., 2017). Resilience is not an inborn trait, but a skillset that can be nurtured over time through personal growth and collective resources (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2024). To develop resilience, there are two main approaches: preparing for hardship and responding after.

Protective factors are habits and support that buffer stress before it becomes overwhelming (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2016). Being adaptable, realistic in goals, and creative in problem-solving strengthens mental resilience (Vahidi, 2021). However, becoming heavily depressed or emotionally-numb “does little to overcome adverse situations” (Skoog, 2023). Individuals and communities must be willing to take action. Unfortunately, people tend to ignore preparation until disaster strikes, choosing the comfort of the present over long-term planning. True resilience is only strong when all are able to actively prepare for hardship before and after crises.

One of the most striking examples of resilience can be found among displaced persons. While many endure persecution, war, and trauma, research shows that “remarkably the majority …don’t go on to develop a psychological disorder” (Dunn, 2024). This phenomenon reflects post-traumatic growth: the positive psychological response that can emerge from struggle and strengthens coping skills (Skoog, 2023). Their ability to adapt often comes from necessity, having to navigate new countries, cultures, and languages, demands flexibility and perseverance. However, this does not occur for everyone, demonstrating the necessity of collective support. Community resilience depends on external resources such as donations, housing, education, and healthcare provided by host nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Patel et al., 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025). Some even transform their hardship into advocacy, like Narmine, a Syrian refugee, whose personal experience drives her to “wake up with a purpose to improve someone else’s day” (Almomani & Carlisle, 2024, para. 1). Resilience is not simply surviving, it is also about finding new ways to grow despite adversity.

 Lastly, the pandemic demonstrated how vulnerable humans are, but also how powerful collective action can be to preserve mental health. Individually, learned optimism allows those who follow the mindset to maintain hope through finding joy in the little things in life, such as baking or home workouts (Moore, 2019). Overwhelmingly negative thoughts will eventually consume a person, making learned optimism a critical coping tool. Despite the initial struggles and shock, communities around the world managed to come together through mutual aid networks supporting healthcare workers and volunteers, and maintaining online connections (Carstensen et al, 2021).

**Solutions**

Global events act as a double-edged sword: they can induce anxiety, but also foster resilience by forcing adaptation. But this only emerges if people believe they have a locus of control, which occurs when crises cause high anxiety spikes and programs are able to restore stability and grow resilience (Botha & Dahmann, 2023). Therefore, international efforts should address loss aversion through mental health programs with volunteer-driven support networks that focus on youth resilience education and digital access to trustworthy therapy.

Mental health programs must be the foundation of addressing anxiety in crisis zones. The United Nations could convene a global mental health convention that commits countries to implement community-level services for those most affected by external factors. These programs can provide youth resilience education by teaching self-efficacy, the belief that one can overcome challenges, which can protect against anxiety later in life (Caprara et al., 2022). Developing coping strategies in both problem-solving and emotion-focused areas ensures future generations are better equipped. Furthermore, both digital and in-person mental health counseling are vital, as people are able to cope better when crises feel manageable. Volunteers and healthcare workers build these traits by fostering trust and networks that bind communities. Human interaction improves mental wellbeing through behavioral activation, turning helplessness into constructive action (Mazzucchelli et al., 2010). Volunteer networks can also be supported by undergraduate and graduate psychology students who can apply and be placed in regions needing urgent support. Finally, these programs should be supported by nonprofit organizations and NGOs, which play crucial roles by advocating for marginalized voices. Although their resources are often fragile with unstable funding and underpaid workers, a global commitment to these programs can mitigate the severity of future global events' effects by treating resilience as more than a temporary response (Soudi, 2024).

**Conclusion**

Global events will continue generating anxiety and chronic stress, which can be exhausting. Just like the character Anxiety from Inside Out 2 who constantly worries about every possible worst-case outcome, anxiety can easily take full control (Docter & Del Carmen, 2024). Resilience, however, is what helps individuals and societies prevent this through support systems, education, and volunteer networks. Though resilience can emerge slowly, it does powerfully, allowing communities to adapt and recover. World crises will continue to test humanity, so community preparedness may be more effective than attempts to repair psychological damage afterwards. By learning resilience strategies and planning coordinated responses, each cycle of anxiety can lead to growth, adaptation, and renewed strength, overcoming the weight of loss aversion.

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