

*Opinion Article*

# Water quality and public health: Challenges of urbanization in a globalized world

Sipho Khwezi\*

Department of Public Health, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa.

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## DESCRIPTION

Urbanization and globalization are two strong factors that have transformed the contemporary world and have a significant impact on health outcomes. They have major positive effects on society and the economy, but they also create threats to public health. Understanding the health impacts of these phenomena requires examining various dimension, including environmental changes, lifestyle modifications, healthcare access, and social determinants of health.

One of the primary health impacts of globalization and urbanization is the alteration of environmental conditions. Urban areas often face significant air pollution due to industrial activities, vehicular emissions, and energy production. Fine particulate matter and other pollutants are linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, increasing morbidity and mortality rates. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that millions of deaths annually can be attributed to air pollution. Water quality and availability also suffer due to urbanization. Rapid urban expansion can dominate existing water and sanitation infrastructure, leading to contaminated water supplies. This increases the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and typhoid fever. Moreover, improper waste disposal and industrial effluents contribute to water pollution, further worsening health risks.

Urbanization and global industrial activity are contributing factors to climate change, which presents new health risks. Increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as heat waves, floods, and storms, have direct and indirect health consequences. Heat waves can lead to heatstroke and exacerbate chronic conditions, while floods can lead to injury, displacement, and outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Globalization and urbanization also significantly influence lifestyle and behavior, often in ways that negatively impact health. Urban environments facilitate sedentary lifestyles due to the nature of work and the availability of transportation. Reduced physical activity contributes to the rise in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. The modern urban diet, often characterized by high-calorie, low-nutrient foods, further worsens these conditions.

Mental health is another critical area affected by these changes. The rapid, high-stress urban lifestyle can lead to increased prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders. This pattern gets worse by the decline of traditional social networks and community institutions, which are frequently replaced by more solitary urban living arrangements.

Furthermore, smoking and excessive drinking are two unhealthy habits that are encouraged by the globalization of consumer culture. These behaviors provide serious risks for liver disorders, malignancies, and other chronic illnesses, making them substantial public health concerns. Globalization and urbanization profoundly impact healthcare access and delivery. Globalization facilitates the spread of medical knowledge and technologies, improving diagnostic and treatment options. Urban areas often have better healthcare infrastructure, providing specialized services and advanced medical facilities. However, disparities in healthcare access persist. Urbanization can lead to overburdened healthcare systems, especially in rapidly growing cities where infrastructure development lags behind population growth. This results in inadequate healthcare services and reduced quality of care. The social determinants of health, including income, education, employment, and housing, are significantly influenced by globalization and urbanization. These factors contribute to health disparities within and between urban and rural populations.

Income inequality is a major concern in urban settings, where the gap between the wealthy and the poor is often evident. Low-income individuals in urban areas may live in overcrowded, substandard housing conditions, increasing their exposure to health hazards such as infectious diseases, pollution, and poor nutrition. These conditions are exacerbated by limited access to healthcare and social services. Education and employment opportunities, while generally more abundant in urban areas, can also reflect deep inequities. Access to quality education and stable, well-paying jobs is important for good health outcomes. Housing quality and stability are critical determinants of health. Urbanization often leads to the development of informal settlements or slums, where living conditions are detrimental to health. These areas lack basic infrastructure, including clean water, sanitation, and safe housing, creating environments where communicable and non-communicable diseases thrive.

\*Corresponding author. Sipho Khwezi,  
Email: siphok1995@gmail.com