

Youths' Psychological Responses to Climate Change

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"[...] only by uniting the power of the entire village could they chase Snake away."
—In "The Virtue of Sacrifice"; [The Kingfisher Story Collection](#) [1]

Climate change, one of the biggest challenges facing us today, has caused direct and indirect impacts on humanity [2]. Increased frequency of extreme weather events and increased disease linked to food, water, zoon, and vectors are fundamental threats climate change induces on human health [3]. Apart from those, adverse events caused by climate change also lead people, especially young people, to suffer immediate and long-term psychological and mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), etc. [4].

Recent years have seen an increase in studies aimed at clarifying this issue. Galway and Field [5] recently conducted a study to discover how young Canadians feel and respond to climate change. One thousand young people between the ages of 16 and 25 participated in a survey for this cross-sectional study. They discovered that many young people often experience negative climatic emotions, including fear, sadness, anxiety, etc., which have detrimental effects on their everyday functioning, mental health, and pessimistic outlook on the future.

Specifically, at least 56% of those surveyed said they felt afraid, sad, anxious, and powerless. 78% said climate change has an influence on their overall mental health, and 37% said their thoughts about climate change harmed their everyday functioning. Moreover, 39% of respondents are hesitant to have children because of climate change, 73% believe the future is terrifying, and 76% believe humans have failed to care for the world.

Another study that looked at how young people's emotional responses to climate change varied by gender, age, and nation was undertaken by Clayton et al. [6]. Data from a survey of 10,000 people aged 16–25 from 10 countries was used for this study; the survey answers were collected using the Kantar platform in May and June of 2021.

The findings reveal that the consequences of climate change were seen less positively by females and older adolescents. There were disparities in emotional response across nations. Respondents in areas threatened by some of the most substantial climate impacts (i.e., the Philippines, India, and Nigeria) expressed higher negative emotions toward climate change than respondents in the United States and Finland. Besides the susceptibility to climate change impacts, the political climate surrounding climate change can also affect the disparities.

The pervasive negative emotions induced by the climate crisis among young people are alarming, as they are still in the vulnerable stage [7,8]. Overwhelming climate anxiety can cause detrimental impacts on young people's future development and decisions, significantly lowering their well-being. Mitigating the effects of climate anxiety and stress on the short-term and long-term mental health of young people is impossible if climate change cannot be tackled. Therefore, in addition to mitigation efforts, we should encourage young people to become agents of change, contributing to the collective efforts of fighting climate change. Building an eco-surplus culture within the societies should be emphasized for this to happen [9].

References

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