Climate change and youth mental health

A brief review of the evidence
Direct mental health impact

The already-substantial burden of mental distress is being (and will continue to be) increased by climate change

• Adverse climate events cause PTSD, depression, anxiety, stress, loss, grief, sadness
  – Are more prevalent than physical injury
  – Exacerbate existing illness or susceptibilities
  – Have long-term effects, and disrupt social and economic activity

• Effective responses depend on effective health systems and networks

These effects are under-represented in climate impact analyses or mitigation plans.

*Kelman 2021, Lawrance 2021, Sharpe 2021.*
A question of justice
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Indirect effects (including “eco-anxiety”)

Young people are increasingly reporting experiences of depression, anxiety and grief in relation to climate change

• Concern and empathy for others; loss, grief, uncertainty
• Anger, loss of trust in leaders
• Danger of over-pathologising: this is a rational response

Individual and group action on climate change may support and improve mental health

• Meaning-focused coping associated with less negative emotion and more life satisfaction

Baudon 2021, Ramadan 2021
Opportunities

We can improve mental health and tackle the climate crisis at the same time

- Engagement with environmental projects
- Co-produced with local networks
- Building resilience and mitigating impact
- Helping YP to find support and encouraging them to take action
- Taking action ourselves!

Baudon 2021, Lawrance 2021, Patrick 2021, Unicef 2021
Summary

1. Invest in effective, local networks and systems
2. Deploy valid and useful measures of impact
3. Meaning-focused coping for eco-anxiety

Cautions

• Risk of over-pathologising
• Siloed evidence, grey literature
Research silos

Articles that mention:  
- Mental health
- Climate change
- Mental health and climate change

Knowledge
- The number of articles published between 2011 – 2021 in PubMed

Mental health: 284,055
Climate change: 478
Mental health and climate change: 54,875

Awareness
- The number of articles published between 2011 – 2021 in The New York Times

Mental health: 13,029
Climate change: 23,928
Mental health and climate change: 257
Brief bibliography


