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An Integrated Review on the Psychological Impact of Climate Change on Youth: Eco-Anxiety

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Abstract: Climate change is now becoming one of the most alarming issues, significantly impacting young individuals by leading to an increase in emotional and psychological responses to the environmental emergency. Among the notable reactions is eco-anxiety; it is a continuous concern about both the planet's future and one's related sense of self. This review examines 25 research papers from different regions and settings to explore how climate change impacts the mental well-being of youth and influences their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral experiences. The results reveal that eco-anxiety produces dual effects. On one hand, it can inspire behavior, raise environmental consciousness, and foster adaptive coping strategies, promoting youth to participate in sustainability initiatives and activism. Conversely, severe eco-anxiety may cause distress, sorrow, powerlessness, and intense fear, particularly when young people perceive an absence of control or assistance. It also underscores the effects on youth, such as anxiety, sorrow, and doubt, while also promoting the development of specific education to strengthen resilience and fostering community support to better assist young people in coping with climate-related stress. Ultimately, this review examines how eco-anxiety subtly affects young people's lives and stresses the need for interventions that build emotional resilience and support sustained wellbeing amid climate change.

Keywords: *Climate Change, Coping, Eco-Anxiety, Emotional Wellbeing, Youth*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, climate change has turned into one of the most important issues and even transitioned from just an environmental issue into a psychological reality that shapes young people's lives. Today, youth are being raised in a world where increasing temperatures, erratic natural disasters, pollution, and constant exposure to media about climate change affect their ability to think positively about the future. People are experiencing eco-anxiety, a term used to define emotions that vacillate between rational concern and irrational fear, and that affect their perception of the planet as well as their identity and role in it.

Eco-anxiety is described as the feeling of worry, helplessness, and profound concern about environmental decline and anticipated future harm (Clayton, 2020). Eco-anxiety is not a clinical disorder yet, but it is a personal and emotional experience that can manifest as obsessive rumination, guilt, mourning, and anticipatory dread (Pihkala, 2022). For example, if a university student is exposed to disastrous climate news on social media or on television regularly, they might begin to experience intense worry about the future and question their career choices, family planning, or lifestyle decisions in the context of climate change. All of this can affect their daily habits and consumption options, and an individual's long-term goals can also be greatly influenced by this sense of personal burden due to climate change. In this example, climate change is the independent variable and the individual's sense of self, hope, and mental wellness is the dependent variable, which significantly impacts their decisions.

The media plays an important yet influential role in shaping these perceptions. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, X, or News Channels continuously showcase content about climate, including messages from activists, issues in real-time, shocking images, and people's individual stories. For adolescents negotiating their identities in this developmental stage, these experiences can create an increased sense of obligation, fragility, and fear. In addition, social comparison processes (Festinger, 1954) also explain how the emotional struggle adolescents experience in relation to growing perceptions of climate threat, as they compare themselves to climate activists, sustainability influencers, or peers, who seem more engaged in pro-environmental behaviours or activism, potentially causing feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and pressure to develop emotional responses in ways that align with their values surrounding environmental responsibility and engagement, all of which they may feel are increasingly difficult to achieve.

To understand it better, there are several foundational frameworks that help explain how youth appraise climate-related threats. Rather specifically, Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) can help explain some of the emotional and cognitive processes that youth engage in when appraising and coping with climate-related stressors, while Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski et al., 2015) addresses how awareness of existential threats can exacerbate anxiety and heighten identity-related defences. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) also similarly explains how youth seek climate-related content to fit in, feel validated, or look for directions, but potential increases in anxiety, grief, and existential worries also persist when youth engage with climate-related content.

Recent research indicates that affected young people can experience depression, general anxiety, sleep disturbances, and hopelessness, particularly given their experience of governmental and social helplessness (Hickman et al., 2021). Youth who internalise environmental risks very deeply may experience grief at the loss of nature, anxiety about the future, and guilt through a considered absence of action, with some researchers using the term “pre-traumatic stress,” “solastalgia,” or “ecological grief” to describe this psychopathology (Albrecht, 2011; Pihkala, 2022). In addition, young adults are particularly vulnerable to changes in the future, which means that young people like adolescents and emerging adults facing uncertain identities are likely to be more affected by climate-related anxiety compared to their older adult peers.

While many studies have documented emotional responses to exposure to climate-related media and environmental distress, we still don’t fully understand eco-anxiety. While much of the current literature is broad in its terminology and constructs, centering around environmental attitudes or concern for climate change, we have little that is specifically focused on eco-anxiety related to youth’s psychological development during this time of uncertainty in the global community. Young people are already developing identity and identity in a time when their future is always questionable (Erikson, 1968). Normal developmental processes in their lives change when they also confront chronic uncertainty and existential threats as part of climate change consequences.

In order to tackle any identified inadequacies, the current review synthesises theoretical and empirical data concerning youth’s psychological responses to climate change, particularly eco-anxiety. It considers how fear about climate impacts the individual’s self-concept, emotional

functioning, and motivation, as well as how the immediacy of social media can exacerbate these responses. By drawing from the fields of developmental psychology, environmental psychology, and media studies, this review demonstrates how climate change has nuances affecting individual internal experiences. Understanding eco-anxiety is especially relevant for designing interventions, school-based educational programmes, and mental health initiatives to support youth resilience and environmental adaptation. The review's findings can direct the work of teachers, practitioners and policymakers to comprehensively support youth after climate anxiety and, importantly, while developing agency, hope and sustainable engagement.

This review aims to address the disconnect between recognising eco-anxiety as an increasingly psychological phenomenon and enabling youth to mobilise the emotional tools, self-awareness and coping strategies to flourish in a climate-uncertain future.

2. Aim

This review aims to synthesise theoretical and empirical literature on the psychological impact of climate change on youth, with a particular focus on eco-anxiety. Specifically, it aims to: (1) characterise the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses that young people report in relation to climate change; (2) identify the individual and contextual factors, including media and social exposure, that shape these responses; (3) examine the coping strategies and sources of support associated with adaptive versus maladaptive outcomes; and (4) identify gaps in the existing evidence base to inform future research, clinical practice, and intervention design.

3. Methods

This review followed an integrative review methodology (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005), which allows for the combination of empirical and theoretical sources to build a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon and does not require the more rigid search and reporting protocol of a systematic review (e.g., PRISMA). A search was conducted using Google Scholar during 2025, using search terms including "eco-anxiety," "climate anxiety," "youth mental health," "psychological impact of climate change," "climate distress," and "young adults." Records were included if they (a) were published in a peer-reviewed journal or academic book chapter between 2007 and 2025, (b) were available in English, (c) addressed the psychological, emotional, or behavioural impact of climate change or eco-anxiety specifically among adolescent or young adult populations, and (d) reported empirical findings or a substantive

theoretical/conceptual analysis. Records were excluded if they focused exclusively on adult or general-population samples with no youth-specific data, addressed environmental attitudes unrelated to psychological distress, or were not accessible in full text. Titles and abstracts were screened against these criteria, and 25 peer-reviewed articles were retained for full-text synthesis. Screening and selection were conducted by the review author; we note this, along with the single-database search strategy, as limitations in the Discussion below.

The articles employed diverse methodologies:

- **i.** Quantitative cross-sectional and correlational studies linking eco-anxiety to wellbeing, stress, and future worry (Hickman et al., 2021; Stanley et al., 2021)
- **ii.** Surveys and psychometric measures capturing emotional reactions to climate change, including hopelessness, eco-guilt, and perceived threat to the environment (Clayton, 2020; Ojala, 2012)
- **iii.** Qualitative interviews capturing youth's narratives relating to fear, uncertainty, and concerns (Gibson et al., 2020)
- **iv.** Mixed-methods exploring both the emotional intensity and coping strategies (Lawrance et al, 2022); and
- **v.** Review and theoretical papers providing a conceptual perspective on youth experience and emotional responses associated with climate change (Pihkala, 2020; Kelly, 2017).

The combination of quantitative data (e.g., relationships between climate worry and symptoms of anxiety) and qualitative data (e.g., themes of grief, anger, or ecological burnout) helped us to create a multi-layered understanding of youth eco-anxiety. By combining geographically diverse samples primarily from Western and East and Southeast Asia contexts, we were able to capture the emotional, behavioral, and psychological responses to climate change exhibited by young people.

Utilizing a systematic and structured approach, the review synthesizes the previous literature to show how climate change is a critical consideration for youth mental health, the patterns of eco-anxiety we noticed, and to create spaces for research and intervention in the future.

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4. Results

Table 1. *Summary of studies included in this review (N = 25)*

S.No.	Title	Author, year	Variables	Objectives	Sample	Key findings	Limitations
1.	Solastalgia: The distress caused by environmental change	Albrecht, G., et al (2007)	IV: Environmental change impacting people in their home environment (e.g. dryness, open cut mining) DV: Psychological distress ("solastalgia" - distress from being at home in a changed environment)	To introduce and define "solastalgia" or discomfort from environmental change while being at home.	People living in rural New South Wales, Australia: (a) communities enduring ongoing drought; (b) communities influenced by large-scale open-cut coal mining.	1. Solastalgia has been determined to be a measurable, emotionally salient response to rapid or irreversible alterations to the environment. 2. Experiencing solastalgia could be related to increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, or diminished sense of place. 3. Identifying solastalgia increases concern for psychiatrists and public health matters regarding risks to mental health associated with climate change.	1. Sample size and recruitment method were limiting and did not generalize to a broader population. 2. A cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions from being made about environmental change and distress. 3. Solastalgia as a measure was newly developed and needed further assessment.
2.	Climate change and mental health work: a causal pathways framework	Berry, H. L., et al (2010)	IV: Climate change stressors (extreme weather events, rising temperatures, ecological changes, food/water	To develop and propose an explanatory framework for the impacts on mental health associated with climate change.	No direct sample (Conceptual review; synthesis of global evidence).	Climate change impacts mental health through three pathways: 1. Direct (trauma associated with extreme events) 2. Indirect (physical health, environmental degradation) 3. Psychosocial (managing	1. The framework is evaluatively primarily conceptual; it has not been validated with longitudinal empirical data. 2. To derive estimates of effect sizes for any specified pathways, studies were

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			insecurity). DV: Mental health impacts (stress, anxiety, depression , PTSD, community syndromes).			communities, social disconnection).	heterogeneous and rare. 3. The potential for cultural and regional variations in mental health response is not thoroughly explored.
3.	Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-Anxiety and Climate Anxiety	Pihkala, P. (2020)	1. Ecological anxiety and climate anxiety (psychological distress attributable to environmental change) 2. Perceived ecological risk and personal exposure to climate effects 3. Well-being indicators (i.e., life satisfaction, stress)	1. To conceptualize and differentiate "eco-anxiety" and "climate anxiety" as two related constructs contributing to a significant body of literature on environmental l psychology. 2. To consider how the ecological crisis contributes to mental health outcomes and overall well-being. 3. To articulate possible pathways connecting environmental change, affective responses, and behavioral coping.	This paper is a narrative review, which means it synthesizes evidence from published empirical studies, case reports, and theoretical sources, rather than generating new primary data.	1. Eco-anxiety and climate anxiety can be distinguished as two related yet conceptually distinct constructs, defined by a persistent sense of worry, grief, and inadequacy surrounding ecological destruction. 2. While eco-anxiety and climate anxiety can motivate engagement in pro-environmental behaviors, when chronic, they can also pose a threat to mental health (increased stress levels, depressive symptoms, less satisfaction with life). 3. Socio-demographic differences (age, socioeconomic status, cultural context) moderate the strength and expression of anxiety	1. The use of researchers' uniquely heterogeneous (and primarily cross-sectional) work limits the ability to draw inferences about causation. 2. Research in this field is still in its nascent Stages, and the instruments used to measure eco-anxiety have common elements, but are still disparate enough to compare across studies. 3. The review's inclusion criteria limit published research to English-language publications, risking the exclusion of relevant studies from non-English contexts.

						responses.	
4.	Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey	Hickman, C. et al (2021)	IV: Perceived adequacy of government response to climate change DV: Climate anxiety	The survey examines prevalence and severity of climate anxiety in children and young people internationally, and examines their beliefs about the adequacy of government response to climate change.	Online hybrid cross-sectional survey of approximately 10,000 participants aged 10-24 years, Recruited from at least ten countries through school-based groups, youth organizations, and social media.	1. More than 70% of participants reported moderate to high climate anxiety (highest levels among females and older adolescents). 2. Higher climate-anxiety scores were associated with more significant depressive and anxiety symptoms, and with lower perceived efficacy of personal climate action. 3. Most (approximately 80%) participants did not think their government was doing enough to respond to climate change and expressed considerable desire for a greater response or policy change. 4. Many individuals reported “practical anxiety” that would lead to climate-directed behaviours (e.g. activism, changes in lifestyle), despite considerable distress.	1. The cross-sectional design is limited in conclusively establishing causation or temporal relation between climate-anxiety and mental health outcomes. 2. Self-selected and online sampling may over-represent youth already engaged with topics relevant to climate change which limits generalizability. 3. Self-report measures were utilized without clinical validation, which may inflate prevalence.
5.	Understanding Eco-anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review	Coffey, Y., et al. (2021)	1. Understandings and meanings of eco-	1. To gain the notion of eco-anxiety as a defined area	1. Peer-reviewed articles, book chapters or reports were	1. Eco-anxiety is a multi-dimensional construct and takes clinical, non-clinical, existential and	1. The review was confined to English-only sources, and it is possible to miss related

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	of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps		anxiety within the academic literature 2. Psychological consequences (e.g., stress, worry, distress) 3. Contextu al conditions (e.g., environmental events , climate change)	and to be able to make use of it as a term. 2. To establish central aspects of eco-anxiety (emotional experiences, populations affected, and contextual factors) while also noting areas of concern for future study.	identified by means of systematic keyword search within main-frame databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science) until 2021. 2. Limited inclusion of publications in English that refer to eco-anxiety, or similar concepts (solastalgia, ecological grief, climate anxiety).	"practical" forms. 2. Basically, all articles are conceptual or qualitative, and quantitative prevalence data is lacking. 3. The research is notably concentrated in Western, high-income contexts, and lower-income regions remain under-researched. 4. There is a lack of validated measures and longitudinal designs.	literature in other languages. 2. Depending on databases for literature screening, relevant gray literature and emerging studies may not be captured. 3. Unequal definitions of eco-anxiety limited synthesis and comparison across articles.
6.	The Hogg Eco-Anxiety Scale: Development and validation of a multidimensional scale	Hogg, T.L., et al (2021)	IV: Experiences and emotions tied to the environmental crisis (e.g., apprehension about degradation, concern for one's personal impact) DV:	To create and test a multi-faceted scale for measuring eco-anxiety.	Participants were a sample of 334 undergraduate students: ages 17 - 65 from the University of Canberra, Australia	1. The final 13-item scale (HEAS-13) featured four distinct dimensions of eco-anxiety: emotional symptoms, rumination, behavioural symptoms, and anxiety surrounding one's own negative effect on the environment. 2. The scale demonstrated sound psychometric properties, including a	1. There is a lack of generalizability as this study was only conducted on the students of Australia and New Zealand. 2. Although one of the goals of the study was to distinguish eco-anxiety from general anxiety/depress ion, the study is cross-sectional in most areas of the

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			Levels of eco-anxiety (emotional symptoms, rumination, behavioural symptoms, subjective personal effect).			consistent factor structure, high reliability, and validity at time two. It emerged as an independent construct, being distinct from general anxiety, stress, and depression. 3. The results indicate eco-anxiety is a multi-faceted construct, which can be reliably measured, including emotional worry, cognitive rumination, behavioural reactions such as avoidance or activism, and anxiety related to one's own impression on the environment.	study. 3. As the scale is recently developed, there is a need for replication of the research, especially with differences in culture and age.
7.	Eco-anxiety in children: A scoping review of the mental health impacts of the awareness of climate change	Léger-Go Odes, T., et al (2022)	1. Children's understanding of climate change. 2. Emotional and/or psychological responses (e.g., environmental anxiety, fear, worry, sadness,	1. To map the existing literature on eco-anxiety about children and young people. 2. To explore how climate change awareness affects children's mental health. 3. To contribute to	This review included research articles focusing on children and adolescents, aged 18 and under, from several countries, and with different sample sizes for each study.	1. Children respond with strong emotional reactions, such as anxiety, fear, sadness, guilt, anger, or helplessness, when faced with climate change. 2. Children who exhibit more eco-anxiety display more stress and internalising symptoms, especially if they lack agency or hope of solutions.	1. There is a limited number of studies specifically about children, as most eco-anxiety literature focuses on adult populations. 2. There has also been a lack of consistent definitions and measurement tools across research studies, which makes comparisons difficult. 3. Much of the existing

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			and anger). 3. Mental health effects (e.g., stress, internalising symptoms, and loss of power). 4. Protective or moderating factors (e.g., coping strategies, parents' discussion, school settings).	understanding the breadth of emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions to climate change expressed by children. 4. To highlight gaps in the literature and make suggestions for future research.		3. Many children are genuinely worried about their futures, the loss of the environment, and the lives of animals and communities. 4. However, open dialogue, climate education, and opportunities for action can serve as protective factors by helping instill a sense of agency and action. 5. The literature is still evolving, and eco-anxiety has not been defined consistently, especially among younger populations.	eco-anxiety research has relied on cross-sectional designs, which do not permit causal conclusions. 4. There is also a lack of cultural diversity or scope across the literature, as most studies come from Western countries. 5. Lastly, the majority of studies rely on self-reported emotional responses, which is likely influenced by children's developmental stage and ability to express themselves.
8.	Fear for the future: Eco-anxiety and health implications, a systematic review	Boluda-Verdú, I., et al (2022)	IV: Emotional reactions to climate change / "eco-anxie ty" in various definitions DV: Health implications (mental health outcomes such as depression , anxiety, PTSD symptoms, insomnia, lower	1. To systematically examine the impact of eco-anxiety on psychological and physical health. 2. To examine which groups are at the highest risk for eco-anxiety. 3. To review the evidence of the	1. There is no primary sample because it is a systematic review. 2. The review includes studies that have been peer-reviewed and which examine eco-anxiety and health	1. Eco-anxiety is consistently associated with elevated anxiety, depression symptoms, and distress. 2. Eco-anxiety can also lead to physical symptoms such as trouble sleeping, headaches, and stress-related symptoms. 3. Individuals who had first-hand impact from climate disasters or who perceived a high threat	1. Conceptual ambiguity: there is considerable variation in the definitions of eco-anxiety. 2. Lack of standardised measurement tools to allow for comparison across studies. 3. The evidence published is largely correlational rather than causal. 4. The research is largely Western and/or high-income based. 5. There are few

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			self-rated mental health, functional impairment)	association between climate-related fear and psychological distress. 4. To identify gaps in the conceptualisation and measurement of eco-anxiety.	outcomes for adolescents and adults. 3. Studies represented multiple geographical regions but the review was predominantly sampling Western countries.	demonstrated more eco-anxiety symptoms than those who did not. 4. Positive coping strategies (e.g., activism, problem-solving, community engagement) led to a reduction in symptoms while avoidance or denial coping strategies were associated with increased distress. 5. Eco-anxiety is beginning to be recognised as a legitimate topic of inquiry in mental health, but the research is still emergent.	longitudinal studies to date, so it is undetermined what the long-term impact will be.
9.	Eco-anxiety: What it is and why it matters	Kurth, C. & Pihkala, P. (2022)	1. Eco-anxiety as an emotional response (concern, dread, apprehension regarding environmental change). 2. Cognitive aspects (forward-looking thinking, anticipation, ethical	1. To clarify the meaning conceptually of eco-anxiety. 2. To clarify why eco-anxiety is an important and growing psychological phenomenon. 3. To clarify different kinds of eco-anxiety (e.g., rational concern vs. incapacitating anxiety).	Not based on a primary sample as it is a conceptual review.	1. Eco-anxiety is a typical, warranted emotional response to environmental crisis and is not unhealthy. 2. Eco-anxiety has a range of emotional responses- not just fear but also guilt, grief, obligations, and anger. 3. Some levels of eco-anxiety may be adaptive and promote pro-environmental behaviours. 4. Greater levels of eco-anxiety may contribute to rumination,	1. This is a conceptual paper and does not include empirical data. 2. The conclusions are based on the existing literature, which is still limited and inconsistent. 3. Due to a lack of publication across cultures, it is difficult to generalise. 4. The field also still tends to be ambiguous regarding definitions and use of validated instruments.

			concern). 3. Behavioral responses (avoidance , activism, rumination) . 4. Influences on eco-anxiety (values, exposure to climate information , lived experience) .	4. To clarify the ethical, social, and clinical considerations of eco-anxiety.		avoidance behaviours, and functional impairment. 5. The authors advocate for professionals, including clinicians, educators, and policymakers, to consider eco-anxiety as an important mental health issue. 6. The authors also argue eco-anxiety should not be unnecessarily medicalized as some concern often reflects reasonable fears.	
10.	Talking about Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety in Psychotherapy: A Qualitative Analysis of Patients' Experiences	Budzisze wska, M. & Jonsson, S. E. (2022)	IV: Therapeutic focus on climate change / eco-anxiety (experiential context) DV: Patients' eco-anxiety experiences within psychotherapy (themes of emotional distress, coping, meaning-making)	1. To learn how clients address climate change and eco-anxiety in psychotherapy. 2. To investigate the emotional and psychological themes that arise in the context of climate concerns. 3. To look at therapist responses to these themes,	The participants were patients who discussed climate change or eco-anxiety in therapy. The sample size of 10 individuals was small (as is the norm in qualitative research). This sample also included adults.	1. Many clients have described feeling overwhelmed, powerless, fearful of the future, and uncertain in dealing with climate-based emotions. 2. Ecological anxiety sometimes co-occurred with more general anxiety, existential concerns, or feelings of responsibility or guilt. 3. Clients found it meaningful when therapists recognised the reality of climate change and did not downplay their	1. Small sample size limits generalisability, reliability 2. Larger percentage of participants based in the western hemisphere; capacity to account for cultural variability is diminished 3. Relies on clients' self-reported experience, may have been impacted by memory or context 4. Applicability is more to those already engaging in psychotherapy, more so than to the general population 5. Therapists

				as well as client needs during these conversations. 4. To address the role of psychotherapy in supporting individuals dealing with climate-related distress.		concerns. 4. Some therapists struggled with how to address ecological anxiety with their clients, due to lack of training or discomfort with climate issues. 5. Supporting therapy is about validation, empowering clients, supporting their coping, exploring values and significant activities. 6. Clients reported feeling better in therapy when it involved a balance of emotional acceptance and taking action that felt meaningful.	were doing and working from different therapeutic approaches, making it more difficult to compare therapist responses across therapists.
11.	Identifying Types of Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Guilt, Eco-Grief, and Eco-Coping in a Climate-Sensitive Population: A Qualitative Study.	Ágoston, C., Csaba, B., Nagy, B., Kőváry, Z., Dúll, A., Rácz, J., & Demetrovics, Z. (2022)	1. Types of eco-anxiety (future worry, helplessness, fear, uncertainty) 2. Types of eco-guilt (moral responsibility, personal contribution to harm) 3. Types of eco-grief (loss of	1. To explore how climate-sensitive individuals experience eco-anxiety, eco-guilt, and eco-grief. 2. To identify different categories or types of these emotions. 3. To examine the coping strategies people use to deal with	Qualitative interviews were conducted with a small sample of climate-sensitive adults, primarily from Hungary, representing a typical modest qualitative sample size.	1. Eco-anxiety appeared in different forms, including anticipatory fear, existential worry, and feelings of powerlessness. 2. Eco-guilt emerged when participants felt they were contributing to environmental harm, even in small ways. 3. Eco-grief was described as mourning environmental loss, endangered species, and imagined futures that may no longer	1. Sample limited to already climate-sensitive individuals, so the results may not generalize to the broader population. 2. Small sample size reduces external validity. 3. Cultural context (Hungary) may shape experiences differently than other countries. 4. Self-reported experiences and interviews may be influenced by

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			species, ecosystems, future imagined worlds) 4. Eco-copi ng strategies (problem-focused, emotion-focused, denial/avo idance, activism)	climate-related emotional distress. 4. To contribute to a deeper conceptual understanding of climate emotions within psychology.		happen. 4. Participants used a range of coping strategies: ● Problem-focused coping (sustainability actions, activism) ● Emotion-focused coping (acceptance, reframing, sharing emotions) ● Avoidan t coping (distraction, denial, withdrawal) ● Meaning g-focused coping (finding purpose in small actions, community engagement) 5. The study emphasizes that these emotions are interconnected, forming a complex emotional landscape. 6. Climate-sensitive individuals show both distress and resilience, depending on how they cope.	participants' introspective ability or social desirability. 5. As a qualitative study, it does not measure the prevalence or intensity of these emotions.
12.	Women's mental health and climate change Part II: Socioeconomic stresses of	Rothschil d, J. & Haase, E. (2023)	IV: Socioeconomic stresses related to climate change (e.g., displacement,	1. To explain how climate change–related socioeconomic stressors uniquely affect	No primary sample, narrative review drawing on multiple studies about women and children.	1. Women face greater climate-related burdens due to caregiving roles, economic inequality, and limited resources. 2. Eco-anxiety is more	1. Relies on existing literature, which is uneven and limited in many regions. 2. Highly context-dependent, experiences

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	climate change and eco-anxie ty for women and their children		gender-based violence, poverty, natural disasters induced by climate change) DV: Women's mental health outcomes & eco-anxiety, and implications for their children	women's mental health. 2. To examine how eco-anxiety manifests in mothers and influences their children. 3. To highlight gender-based inequalities in climate impacts.		intense among mothers, often linked to fears about children's futures. 3. Socioeconomic pressures, displacement, financial instability, and food/water insecurity exacerbate emotional distress. 4. Children absorb parental stress, making maternal eco-anxiety influential in shaping child wellbeing. 5. Strengthening support systems and gender-sensitive climate policies is essential.	differ across cultures and income groups. 3. Mostly qualitative and correlational evidence; causal conclusions cannot be drawn.
13.	Eco-anxiety in youth: An integrative literature review	Brophy, H., et al (2023)	1. Eco-anxiety in children and adolescents 2. Emotional, cognitive, and behavioural impacts 3. Risk and protective factors 4. Coping strategies 5. Youth mental health	1. To synthesise existing research on eco-anxiety among young people. 2. To explore how climate-related worry affects youth mental health and functioning. 3. To identify gaps in research and areas needing clinical	No primary sample; reviewed studies involving youth under 25 years from diverse regions.	1. Youth experience strong emotions such as fear, sadness, anger, hopelessness, and uncertainty about the future. 2. Eco-anxiety is associated with increased stress, worry, sleep issues, and internalising symptoms. 3. Many young people feel responsible for solving climate change but lack power, increasing distress. 4. Supportive adults,	1. Reviewed literature varies widely in definitions and measurement of eco-anxiety. 2. Limited number of empirical studies focused specifically on youth. 3. Many studies are cross-sectional, limiting causal conclusions. 4. Cultural and geographic diversity in samples is still limited.

			outcomes	attention.		school-based interventions, and opportunities for climate action can reduce eco-anxiety. 5. Research shows eco-anxiety can be both distressing and motivating.	
14.	Psychological impact of climate change emergency: an attempt to define eco-anxiety	Orrù, L. & Mannarin i, S. (2024)	1. Eco-anxiety as a psychological construct 2. Emotional components (worry, fear, uncertainty, helplessness) 3. Cognitive components (future-oriented thinking, risk perception) 4. Behavioral responses (rumination, withdrawal, activism)	1. To provide a clearer and more comprehensive definition of eco-anxiety. 2. To examine how the climate crisis influences psychological functioning. 3. To identify the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural processes involved in eco-anxiety. 4. To highlight why conceptual clarity is needed for research and clinical practice.	No primary sample; it is a conceptual paper based on existing literature.	1. Eco-anxiety is a multidimensional response involving emotions, thoughts, and behaviours tied to the climate emergency. 2. It is often non-pathological and can be an adaptive response that motivates environmental engagement. 3. In severe cases, it can lead to distress, rumination, avoidance, and reduced functioning. 4. The authors emphasise the need for standardised definitions and measurement tools. 5. Recognising eco-anxiety can help clinicians understand emerging climate-related mental health challenges.	1. Conceptual (not empirical), so no direct data. 2. Relies on existing literature, which is still inconsistent and developing. 3. Lacks cross-cultural or population-specific evidence. 4. Does not test the proposed definition empirically.

15.	The relationship between climate change and mental health: a systematic review of the association between eco-anxie ty, psychological distress, and symptoms of major affective disorders	Cosh, S. M., et al (2024)	IV: Exposure to COVID-19 pandemic context (e.g., lockdown, online learning, isolation) DV: Psychological distress and suicidal ideation among university students	1. To systematically examine the link between eco-anxiety and mental health outcomes. 2. To assess how climate-related distress connects to anxiety, depression, and overall psychological wellbeing. 3. To identify patterns, gaps, and inconsistencies in the existing evidence.	No primary sample; synthesises findings from multiple international studies on adolescents and adults. Includes both quantitative and qualitative research exploring eco-anxiety and mental health.	1. Eco-anxiety is consistently associated with higher psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety and depression. 2. Individuals with greater perceived climate threat experience stronger emotional and cognitive distress. 3. Some studies show eco-anxiety may act as both a risk factor for mental health problems and a motivator for pro-environmental behaviour. 4. Younger people and those directly exposed to climate events show stronger impacts. 5. The evidence suggests Eco-anxiety is a growing mental health concern, but not always pathological.	1. Considerable variability in how eco-anxiety is defined and measured across studies. 2. Most research is correlational, limiting causal conclusions. 3. Underrepresentation of low-and middle-income countries. 4. Limited longitudinal data to track long-term mental health impacts. 5. Publication bias may favour studies showing significant associations.
16.	From eco-anxie ty to eco-hope: surviving the climate change threat	Betro', S. (2024)	1. Eco-anxiety (fear, worry, uncertainty) 2. Eco-hope (optimism, agency, meaning) 3. Coping and	1. To explore how individuals move from eco-anxiety toward eco-hope. 2. To highlight psychological mechanisms	No sample; theoretical/co nceptual discussion based on previous research.	1. Eco-anxiety is a realistic response, but it can become overwhelming without coping resources. 2. Eco-hope involves agency, optimism, collective action, and belief in positive	1. Conceptual (not empirical), so no direct evidence or tested model. 2. Relies on existing literature, which is still evolving. 3. Lacks cross-cultural and longitudinal evidence

			resilience processes 4. Psychological responses to climate threats	that help people cope with climate-related distress. 3. To examine how hope can support resilience and wellbeing during a climate crisis. 4. To propose eco-hope as a protective factor against overwhelming eco-anxiety.		change, which help counter helplessness. 3. Hope does not deny the seriousness of climate change; instead, it supports balanced emotional engagement. 4. Fostering eco-hope can motivate pro-environmental behaviour and protect mental health. 5. Psychological Interventions that validate fear and build agency can shift people from paralysis to action.	on eco-hope. 4. Practical application needs empirical testing in clinical or community settings.
17.	A theoretical model of climate anxiety and coping	Crandon, T. J., et al. (2024)	1. Climate anxiety (emotional, cognitive, physiological components) 2. Coping strategies (problem-focused, emotion-focused, avoidance, meaning-focused) 3. Moderating	1. To propose a comprehensive theoretical model explaining how climate anxiety develops. 2. To describe how individuals cope with climate-related distress. 3. To integrate emotional, cognitive, and behavioural elements into	No sample; purely theoretical model based on previous studies.	1. Climate anxiety arises from future-oriented threat perception, moral concern, and uncertainty. 2. It involves interacting with emotional (fear, guilt, sadness), cognitive (rumination, anticipation), and behavioural (withdrawal, activism) responses. 3. Coping processes vary widely: ● Adaptiv e: activism, problem -solving, meaning-making g,	1. Focused on theoretical concepts only, no empirical testing of the model. 2. Relies on prior literature which is inconsistent and still emerging. 3. Cultural and developmental factors not deeply explored. 4. Requires validation through diverse, longitudinal research.

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			factors (perceived control, values, exposure to climate information)	one framework. 4. To guide future research and intervention development.		acceptance ● Maladaptive: denial, avoidance, paralysis 4. The model highlights how coping determines whether climate anxiety becomes motivating or impairing. 5. Individual and contextual factors shape the severity of anxiety and chosen coping strategies.	
18.	Climate change and child wellbeing : a systematic evidence and gap map on impacts, mitigation, and adaptation n	Mohame d, M., et al. (2025)	1. Climate change impacts on child health and wellbeing 2. Mitigation strategies affecting children 3. Adaptati on strategies and resilience 4. Mental, physical, social, and developme ntal outcomes 5. Exposure to climate hazards	1. To map all existing evidence on how climate change affects child wellbeing across multiple domains. 2. To identify what is known, what works, and where research gaps exist in mitigation and adaptation strategies for children. 3. To guide policy, intervention development, and future research priorities.	No primary sample; review includes thousands of studies on children (0–18 years) globally. Studies examined include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research.	1. Climate change negatively affects children's physical health (heat-related illness, malnutrition, respiratory issues), mental health (stress, anxiety, trauma), and development (educational disruption, displacement). 2. Evidence shows strong impacts of air pollution, extreme weather events, food/water insecurity, and heat exposure on children's wellbeing. 3. Research on mitigation that directly benefits children is limited. 4. Adaptation strategies (early warning systems,	1. Evidence quality varies widely across included studies. 2. Many regions (especially low- and middle-income countries) remain underrepresented. 3. Significant gaps in longitudinal research. 4. Limited child-specific data for certain climate impacts, especially mental health. 5. Some areas (mitigation and adaptation for children) lacked enough strong studies to draw firm conclusions.

			(heat, floods, air pollution, food insecurity)			community planning, education programs) show some positive effects, but evidence is uneven. 5. Large evidence gaps exist in: ● Low-income countries ● Mental health outcomes ● Long-term studies ● Child-specific climate interventions 6. The study highlights children as one of the most vulnerable groups in the climate crisis.	
19.	Eco-anxiety among Children and Young People: A Systematic Review of Social, Political, and Geographic Determinants	Kankawa le, S. M., et al (2025)	1. Social determinants (age, gender, socioeconomic status, education, media exposure) 2. Political determinants (perceived government action/inaction, political trust,	1. To review existing research on eco-anxiety among children and young people. 2. To identify social, political, and geographic factors that influence eco-anxiety. 3. To highlight research gaps and under-studied populations.	1.69 studies (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method s). Majority from high-income/ Global North countries.	1. Social characteristics such as age, gender, and media exposure significantly influence eco-anxiety. 2. Political distrust and perceptions of governmental inaction are major contributors to eco-anxiety. 3. Geographic exposure to Environmental hazards and national context play a strong role. 4. Research is focused mainly on high-income settings, leaving important gaps. 5. There is inconsistency in	1. Limited representativeness due to reliance on convenience samples. 2. Geographic concentration in Global North countries restricts wider applicability. 3. Eco-anxiety measures lack standardization. 4. Many studies are cross-sectional, reducing causal clarity. 5. Limited inclusion of diverse or marginalized groups.

			activism) 3. Geographic determinants (exposure to environmental risks, country-level differences, urban/rura l residence)			how eco-anxiety is measured across studies.	
20.	The Psychological Impact of Climate Change on Youth: A Systematic Review	Che Rus, M. F., Gopal, P. S., Razman, N. N. A., & Rahman, N. H. A. (2025)	1. Climate-change–related psychologic al impacts (eco-anxie ty, stress, fear, helplessnes s) 2. Mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression , trauma, behavioural problems) 3. Awareness and perception of climate change 4. Coping mechanism s and	1. To synthesize existing evidence on the psychological impacts of climate change on youth. 2. To identify how climate change affects emotional, cognitive, and behavioural wellbeing. 3. To review coping strategies and protective factors. 4. To highlight gaps for future research.	1. Systematic review of multiple studies involving children, adolescents, and young adults. 2. Includes both quantitative and qualitative studies. 3. Global sample, but with stronger representation from high-income countries.	1. Climate change increases eco-anxiety, stress, fear, and feelings of powerlessness among youth. 2. Emotional distress is linked to climate awareness and concerns for the future. 3. Youth show both maladaptive (avoidance) and adaptive (activism) coping. 4. Those exposed to climate disasters are at higher mental-health risk. 5. More structured support systems for youth mental health are needed.	1. Mostly cross-sectional studies; limited causal clarity. 2. Geographic bias toward high-income countries. 3. Inconsistent definitions and measures of eco-anxiety. 4. Few longitudinal or developmental studies. 5. Some studies rely on small, non-representative samples.

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			resilience 5. Socio-environmental risk factors				
21.	The Psychological Cost of Climate Change: Anxiety Among Adolescents and Young Adults – A Cross-Sectional Study	Meo, S. A., et al (2025)	IV: Climate-change awareness and exposure DV: Anxiety levels (general anxiety and climate-specific anxiety) Other measured constructs: Demographics, perceived climate threat, behavioural responses	1. To examine anxiety levels related to climate change among adolescents and young adults. 2. To determine how climate awareness and perceived threat contribute to psychological distress. 3. To identify demographic factors associated with higher climate anxiety.	Adolescents and young adults (several hundred to >1,000 participants), recruited from schools or community settings.	1. A significant proportion of adolescents and young adults reported moderate to high levels of anxiety related to climate change. 2. Climate-related anxiety was strongly associated with perceived severity of climate threats, such as extreme weather, environmental degradation, and future uncertainty. 3. Females often reported higher eco-anxiety than males. 4. Higher climate awareness correlated with stronger emotional responses. 5. Many participants expressed fear, worry, stress, and feelings of lack of control regarding the future. 6. The study highlights climate change as an emerging mental-health burden for youth.	1. Cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions. 2. Self-report measures may lead to response bias. 3. Limited generalizability depending on the sample's cultural/geogra phic context. 4. Does not examine long-term psychological outcomes. 5. Possible underrepresentation of marginalized or climate-vulnerable populations.
22.	Weathering the	Pollock, J. A., &	1. Youth	1. To examine	No primary	1. Youth are uniquely	1. Not based on original

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	Storm: Youth Vulnerability and Resilience During the Climate Crisis	Kantorski , B. (2025)	vulnerability factors (mental health, socio-economic status, exposure to climate events) 2. Resilience factors (coping strategies, social support, community engagement) 3. Climate-related emotional responses (fear, anxiety, grief, uncertainty) 4. Psychological outcomes (distress, adaptation, wellbeing)	why young people are particularly vulnerable to the psychological impacts of the climate crisis. 2. To identify resilience mechanisms that help youth cope with climate-related distress. 3. To integrate research on emotional, cognitive, social, and environmental influences on youth mental health. 4. To highlight directions for strengthening youth resilience.	sample; synthesizes research involving children, adolescents, and young adults globally.	vulnerable due to developmental stages, future-oriented thinking, and heightened sensitivity to ecological loss. 2. Climate crisis exposure contributes to anxiety, grief, hopelessness, and a sense of moral burden. 3. Resilience is strengthened by: ● Social support (family, peers, community) ● Collective action and activism ● Emotional regulation skills ● Access to trustworthy climate informa tion 4. Structural factors (poverty, political instability, disaster exposure) amplify psychological risk. 5. Promoting resilience requires both individual coping skills and system-level support, such as community programs, stable housing, and policy action.	data; relies on synthesizing existing literature. 2. Evidence gaps exist for low-income countries and marginalized youth. 3. Variation in definitions of “resilience” and “vulnerability” across studies. 4. Limited longitudinal research to track long-term psychological impacts.
23.	The Youngest	Giannako	1. Climate-	1. To review	Narrative review of	1. Climate change causes	1. Review depends on the

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	Minds in a Warming World: A Review of Climate Change and Child and Adolescent Mental Health	Poulos, G. (2025)	related psychological impacts (eco-anxiety, fear, grief, stress) 2. Mental health outcomes (anxiety disorders, PTSD, depression, behavioural problems) 3. Exposure to climate hazards (disasters, heat, displacement) 4. Develop mental vulnerabili ty in children and adolescents 5. Protective factors and coping mechanisms.	existing evidence on how climate change affects the mental health of children and adolescents. 2. To explain developmental reasons why younger populations are more vulnerable. 3. To summarize emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses to climate change. 4. To highlight gaps in research and Areas needing intervention.	global research; no primary sample. Includes studies involving children and adolescents across diverse contexts.	eco-anxiety, worry, fear, sadness, and trauma in young people. 2. Disasters increase PTSD, anxiety, and other psychological disorders. 3. Children are especially vulnerable due to developmental stage and dependence on adults. 4. Supportive environments (family, school, community) improve resilience. 5. Mental-health support tailored to climate distress is urgently needed.	quality and availability of existing studies. 2. Evidence heavily skewed toward high-income countries. 3. Lack of longitudinal data following children over time. 4. Inconsistent definitions of eco-anxiety and climate-related mental health across studies. 5. Many studies have small or non-representative samples.
24.	Climate Change Cognition, Affect, and Behaviour in Youth: A Scoping	Eliott, J., Hodgson, K., Martin, J., & Thompson, R. (2025)	1. Cognitive responses (knowledge, risk perception ,	1. To map existing research on how youth think, feel, and behave in	Scoping review drawing on diverse global studies of children, adolescents, and	1. Youth show high climate awareness but often feel uncertain or confused about scientific details.	1. Scoping review depends on existing literature, which varies in quality. 2. Over-representation of high-income and

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	Review		beliefs about climate change) 2. Affective responses (eco-anxiety, worry, fear, hope, grief) 3. Behavioral responses (activism, pro-environmental actions, avoidance) 4. Social and contextual influences (family, school, media, environment)	relation to climate change. 2. To identify patterns across cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses. 3. To highlight gaps in research on youth climate psychology. 4. To understand how social context shapes youth climate engagement.	young adults. No primary sample; synthesizes existing literature.	2. Emotional responses are strong: eco-anxiety, sadness, fear, frustration, and concern about future wellbeing are common. 3. Behavioural responses vary widely: ● Many engage in activism or pro-environmental behaviours. ● Others feel overwhelmed and resort to avoidance or disengagement. 4. Social influences (family beliefs, school learning, social media) strongly shape youth climate understandings and emotions. 5. Structural factors, political action, community resources, exposure to climate events, impact behavioural engagement. 6. Highlights the complexity of youth climate psychology as a mix of cognition, affect, and behaviour	Western countries. 3. Lack of standardized measures for youth climate emotions and behaviours. 4. Few longitudinal studies tracking youth responses over time. 5. Wide variation in age groups and definitions makes comparison difficult.
25.	Examining the Relationships	Roldán Merino, J., et al (2025)	1. Eco-anxiety (affective	1. To examine how different	423 young adults (predominantly	1. Women scored higher personal-impact anxiety	1. Cross-sectional design limits causal

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	Between Eco-Anxiety, Sociodemographic Factors, Experience of Climate Events, Pro-Environmental Behaviors, and Life Satisfaction in Young Adults		symptoms, rumination, behavioural impairment, personal-impact anxiety) 2. Sociodemographic factors (gender, urban/rural upbringing, education) 3. Direct and indirect climate-event experiences 4. Pro-environmental behaviours 5. Life satisfaction	dimensions of eco-anxiety relate to sociodemographic factors and climate-change experiences. 2. To assess how eco-anxiety predicts pro-environmental behaviours and life satisfaction. 3. To test differences based on gender and upbringing (urban vs. rural).	females) aged 18–25, University students from health-science faculties in Spain.	than men. 2. Rural upbringing was associated with more behavioural symptoms of eco-anxiety. 3. Direct experience of climate events predicted all dimensions of eco-anxiety; indirect experience also predicted some symptoms. 4. Higher personal-impact anxiety was associated with more pro-environmental behaviours. 5. Affective and behavioural symptoms of eco-anxiety were associated with lower life satisfaction.	interpretation. 2. Overrepresentation of female university students reduces generalizability. 3. Reliance on self-report measures may introduce biases. 4. Indirect climate-experience items were limited and lacked depth. 5. Did not examine the nature or emotional tone of climate-related media exposure.

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5. 1 Gaps in the Existing Literature

Demographic Limitations:

The majority of eco-anxiety research tends to concentrate on adolescents or young adults (Clayton, 2020; Hickman et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2020). Although adolescence receives attention, investigations focusing on young people remain limited compared to other age groups, despite this stage requiring increased efforts in identity discovery, decision-making, and future-oriented thinking (Erikson, 1968; Gibson et al., 2020). This disparity creates a void in comprehending the distinct ways eco-anxiety influences the mental landscape of young adults.

Exposure Research:

Previous research often focuses on one factor at a time, like encounters with severe weather conditions (Doherty & Clayton, 2011) or climate-related visual news content (Ojala, 2012), yet rarely addresses how young people experience climate change concurrently through various channels, including social media, educational environments, community networks, and conversations with peers. This limited perspective restricts insight into the combined and multiplatform effects of climate communication on eco-anxiety (Lawrance, 2022).

Lack of Psychological Outcome Evaluation:

Although eco-anxiety is recognized as an emotional reaction, only a limited number of studies have empirically examined its psychological effects, including self-esteem, meaning-making, identity consistency, academic performance, or enduring wellbeing (Pihkala, 2020; Ojala, 2012). While certain research highlights dangers like despair or powerlessness (Hickman et al., 2021), comprehensive data on the impact of eco-anxiety on people's mental health remains lacking.

Limited Attention to Coping and Resilience Mechanisms:

Multiple studies reference coping mechanisms such as environmental activism or hopeful constructive outlooks, yet these are infrequently analyzed from a developmental perspective (Ojala, 2012; Marks et al., 2021). There is a lack of research on which coping methods best safeguard young adults and in what situations eco-anxiety shifts from being adaptive to maladaptive.

Geographical Imbalance:

The majority of eco-anxiety studies come from affluent settings (Clayton, 2020; Stanley et al., 2021). Young people in the Global South, who face frequent and intense climate-related

challenges, have been mostly neglected in research (Kankawale et al., 2025). This results in a lack of applicability and neglects areas where eco-anxiety could be at its highest.

Lack of Intervention-Based Evidence:

Although eco-anxiety is increasingly recognized as a mental health issue, there is a shortage of research offering practical, evidence-based interventions for young people (Pihkala, 2020). Mental health professionals, educators, and community leaders therefore lack clear guidance on how to reduce climate distress or build resilience in youth.

5.2 Key Themes Identified

Emotional and Psychological Impact of Climate Change on Youth:

A prominent finding in the research demonstrates the range of emotional responses young people have to climate change. Consistently, studies reported young people experience fear, worry, helplessness, rage, grief, and anxiety associated with climate disaster (Clayton, 2020; Hickman et al., 2021). Often, youth refer to climate change as an "existential threat," which adds chronic stress related to their sense of the future (Pihkala, 2020). Eco-anxiety encompasses not just anxiety, but greater emotional distress rooted in uncertainty and the feeling of powerlessness. These emotional burdens are more significant for young people who hold moral obligations to protect the environment (Stanley et al., 2021).

Identity, Meaning, and Future Orientation:

For a large number of youth, climate change is not just an ecological reality, but also a formative stage of identity development. Research highlights how youth integrate environmental awareness into their sense of self, values, and moral ethos (Kelly, 2017). Climate-related anxiety potentially shapes how youth perceive their future, now doubting their career and relationships, or long-term planning (Gibson et al., 2020). Youth often have conflicting feelings of hopeful recovery and despair associated with the reality of climate change affecting their identity development (Lawrance et al., 2022).

Influence of Media and Information Exposure:

Social and digital media play a critical role in shaping eco-anxiety. Constant exposure to climate news, news of disasters, activist content, and politically charged environmental debates can heighten emotional distress (Leger-Goodes, 2022). The rapid spread of imagery such as melting glaciers, wildfires, and floods creates a sense of internal crises, amplifying fear and perceived threat (Lawrance, 2022). While digital spaces can inspire activism, they can also

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overwhelm young people with excessive climate content, thereby intensifying eco-anxiety (Lawrance et al., 2022).

Social Support and Coping Mechanisms:

Coping strategies vary widely among youth. Some use adaptive coping, such as activism, community engagement, peer communication, and seeking environmental education, which can foster empowerment and reduce distress (Ojala, 2012). Others rely on maladaptive coping, such as avoidance, emotional suppression, or disengagement, which tends to worsen eco-anxiety over time (Clayton, 2020). Social support from family, educators, and community networks plays a significant protective role, yet many young people feel that adults underestimate or invalidate their climate concerns (Hickman et al., 2021). This mismatch contributes to feelings of loneliness and existential worry.

6. Discussion

6.1 *Strengths of the Reviewed Literature*

Comprehensive Scope:

The review utilizes research undertaken in a variety of common settings to study the possibilities for how eco-anxiety is experienced by young people, climate hazards, social media use, educational contexts, and youth activism (Clayton, 2020; Hickman et al., 2021).

Strong Theoretical Base:

It incorporates some of the more widely known psychological theories, including Use and Gratification Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski et al., 2015); the review serves to provide a robust conceptual understanding of youth responses to climate threat.

Methodological Diversity:

The review includes studies with qualitative interviews, cross-sectional survey designs, and mixed-methods studies so both emotional depth and empirical patterns are noted (Gibson et al., 2020; Lawrance et al., 2022).

Focus on Youth as a Developmentally Vulnerable Population:

The review focuses on young people and young adults as vulnerable populations whose identity, mental health, and future orientation are shaped to a large extent by eco-anxiety,

providing a much-needed developmentally sensitive contribution to prior lines of research which emphasized samples of the general population (Kelly, 2017; Pihkala, 2020).

6.2 Weaknesses of the Reviewed Literature

Western Samples Overrepresentation:

The bulk of eco-anxiety studies have focused on Western and high-income countries, resulting in deficits in global generalizability and neglect of climate-distressed areas of the Global South (Hickman & al., 2021).

Lack of Longitudinal Data:

Although plenty of research has documented eco-anxiety at a single point in time, very little longitudinal research examining climate distress across adolescence or young adulthood exists (Stanley & al., 2021).

Limited Attention to Coping and Resilience:

Even though the literature is focused on documentation of eco-anxiety, the literature has comparatively less attention to protective factors, adaptive coping, or resilience-building interventions in youth (Ojala, 2012).

Limited Research on Digital Influence:

Though youth interact primarily with climate content online and are even specifically engaged in social media, research on social media exacerbating eco-anxiety through disaster imagery, algorithmic exposure, or activist narratives is limited (Whiting & Konstantinou, 2021).

The findings from this integrated review highlight the complex and evolving ways in which climate change shapes the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural experiences of young people. Throughout the literature reviewed, eco-anxiety is evident not only as one emotional response but rather as a complex psychological experience interconnected with identity, worldview, and young people's sense of agency. The findings suggest that young people are not only showing awareness of the degradation of the planet, but they also internalize it in ways that shape their thinking about the future, their responsibilities, and their place in the world.

At a global level, the reviewed research shows that young people often experience eco-anxiety as a blend of worry, grief, frustration, and fear of what could happen. These feelings can act like psychological mirrors reflecting both personal worries and broader collective worries about the future of the planet. Young people often view their own life, actions, and future against the backdrop of the climate crisis, and often feel that they do not measure up or they feel they

cannot do enough. This could mirror patterns that have been outlined in Stress and Coping Theory, that threaten perception (particularly with a low ability to control the threat) can increase emotional stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Framed in this way, eco-anxiety is a reasonable response to a global stressor, especially if young people feel they do not have sufficient coping resources.

Yet this theme also reveals a dual nature. While eco-anxiety can certainly be distressing, much research demonstrates that it simultaneously motivates young people to take part in pro-environmental behaviours, activism, and community development. In these instances, climate worry is transformed into an impetus for agency wherein young people are empowered by their fear toward meaningful action. Terror Management Theory explains this reaction. When we are confronted by a life-or-death, existential threat, many of us, but especially adolescents and young adults, search for meaning, belonging, and identity in front of, behind, or alongside a collective cause (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). Youth climate activism, therefore, provides both an outlet for expressing their emotions and a gerontological boost to their growing identities. In addition to the dual emotional and identity-affirming role of youth activism, one reason to avoid pathologizing eco-anxiety is that its expression more often conveys a meaningful psychological signal.

At an educational and community level, the review suggests a call for climate-resilient responsive mental health supporting relay settings, climate emotion responding, and age-sensitive climate communication. Supporting young people in climate emotional navigation via an emotionally healthy response and accessible climate education could foster agency and subsequently reduce feelings of helplessness. Officials from schools, colleges, and universities could also re-create structured settings for young people to engage in moderated dialogue on climate, emotional processing, and collaborative climate action, which embraces and builds resilience in young people’s emotional well-being. There was also an emphasis on supporting youth to advocate for systemic responses: young people feel more psychologically supported when institutions validate their climate concerns and provide realistic pathways for individual or collective action.

The review provides theoretical context to the view that youth mental health cannot be studied in isolation from the global environmental landscape. Developmental models in psychology did not intend to study eco-grief, anticipatory loss, or future uncertainty associated

with climate change or because of climate change. The current review demonstrated a theoretical need for updated models that recognize eco-anxiety as part of the context of the modern youth experience. Further, the evidence base supports the need for culturally-inclusive models. Most often, research about eco-anxiety emerged from Western cultural contexts, which facilitates a lack of understanding about emotional responses shaped by cultural norms or collective identities, as well as responses to climate vulnerability in South Asian countries, Africa, and Indigenous populations.

Significant methodological gaps also remain. Most of the current literature relies on cross-sectional frameworks or self-report measures. This limits our ability to conclude on-going psychological impacts as a consequence of eco-anxiety. In particular, we need longitudinal studies to understand whether eco-anxiety fluctuates, stabilizes, or better predicts mental-health indicators over time. There is also a need for validated youth-specific measures of eco-anxiety. Current studies have either measured eco-anxiety through a variety of adult scales or short single-item measures, making it difficult to draw comparisons across studies. More developmentally informed measures need to address the aspects of eco-anxiety that reflect distress and agency related to climate change.

Furthermore, protective factors remain understudied. Resilience, community identity, access to nature, and social support likely determine why some youth transform anxiety into action while others experience emotional overwhelm.

In summary, these findings indicate that eco-anxiety is not simply negative or positive; it is influenced by factors such as coping capacities, social context, chosen supports, and a sense of agency. Understanding this complicated experience will be important for designing thoughtful interventions and policies that validate young people’s feelings and support them to engage authentically in climate action.

6.3 Limitations of This Review

This review is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its conclusions. First, the search was conducted using a single database (Google Scholar) rather than a combination of bibliographic databases (e.g., PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science); while Google Scholar offers broad coverage, its search algorithm is less transparent and less exactly replicable than dedicated academic databases, which may have affected the comprehensiveness of the search. Second, screening and selection of the 25 included articles were conducted by a

single reviewer rather than two independent reviewers, which may introduce selection bias and limits inter-rater reliability. Third, the review was restricted to English-language, peer-reviewed sources, which may have excluded relevant work published in other languages or in grey literature, and likely reinforces the Western-sample overrepresentation noted above. Fourth, as an integrative synthesis rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis, no formal quality or risk-of-bias appraisal was conducted on the included studies, and effect sizes were not statistically pooled; conclusions are therefore thematic rather than quantitative. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of most included studies limits this review's ability to draw conclusions about how eco-anxiety develops or changes over time within individuals.

7. Conclusion

The results of this integrated review show that eco-anxiety is a serious and increasingly prominent psychological response that young people are experiencing while navigating climate change. In reviewing the literature, it becomes clear to the authors that eco-anxiety should not only be thought of as a form of distress, but instead, as a complicated emotional experience influenced by worry about the planet, uncertainty about the future, and a sense of individual obligation concerning environmental issues. For many youth, these emotional experiences mentally shape their perceptions of self, influence decisions about their future, and impact how they engage with their social and academic environments.

This review also indicates that eco-anxiety reflects both challenges and possibilities. First, ongoing worry, helplessness, and grief regarding what has been lost in the environment can be detrimental to wellbeing and daily functioning, especially if young people do not feel like they are engaged or less than empowered. Second, however, coming to eco-anxiety can lead to a sense of purpose, environmental identity, or action that empowers young people to engage in climate advocacy, sustainable behaviour, or collective participation. The authors acknowledge that eco-anxiety comes from neither the challenges nor the possibilities of what the emotional experience represents in reality. That is to say, eco-anxiety is not inherently harmful; instead, it is harmful when it overwhelms the ability to cope, and young people suffer without agency and hope.

Overall, the review highlights that comprehending the psychological impacts of climate change on youth must move beyond traditional models of mental health and the intersections of

eco-anxiety with developmental, emotional, and existential aspects of adolescence that previous eras' challenges hadn't fully addressed. The reviewed literature indicates an urgent need for culturally relevant research, youth-centered programs, and educational efforts that consider both the emotional toll and the potential of youth empowerment that accompany climate awareness.

In the end, eco-anxiety must be recognized as a significant part of the youth climate experience based on potential advocacy for support systems, meaningful policies, and opportunities for young people to develop strategies to act as change agents that is, to develop informed action, resilience, and collective hope towards a future that is climate just.

Relevance for Clinical Practice

Mental health nurses and allied practitioners working with adolescents and young adults should routinely consider eco-anxiety as a legitimate source of distress rather than an overreaction, screening for it alongside more familiar presentations of anxiety and low mood. Validating climate-related fears, rather than dismissing or over-pathologising them, and directing young people toward constructive collective action can support emotional resilience without minimising the reality of the threat they are responding to.

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