

# Growing climate anxiety poses significant threat to individuals and society

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Levels of eco-anxiety—the chronic fear of environmental doom—are growing, particularly among children and young people, and are likely to be significant and potentially damaging to individuals and society, warn experts in *The BMJ* today.

Mala Rao and Richard A Powell say neglecting the effects of increasing eco-anxiety "risks exacerbating health and [social inequalities](#) between those more or less vulnerable to these psychological impacts," while the socioeconomic effects—as yet hidden and unquantified—"will add

considerably to the national costs of addressing the climate crisis."

And they call on leaders to "recognize the challenges ahead, the need to act now, and the commitment necessary to create a path to a happier and healthier future, leaving no one behind."

They point to a 2020 survey of child psychiatrists in England showing that more than half (57%) are seeing children and young people distressed about the climate crisis and the state of the environment.

And a recent international survey of climate anxiety in young people aged 16 to 25 showed that the psychological (emotional, cognitive, social, and functional) burdens of climate change are "profoundly affecting huge numbers of these young people around the world."

These findings also offer insights into how young people's emotions are linked with their feelings of betrayal and abandonment by governments and adults, they write. Governments are seen as failing to respond adequately, leaving [young people](#) with "no future" and "humanity doomed."

So what is to be done to alleviate the rising levels of climate anxiety, they ask?

"The best chance of increasing optimism and hope in the eco-anxious young and old is to ensure they have access to the best and most reliable information on [climate](#) mitigation and adaptation," they explain.

"Especially important is information on how they could connect more strongly with nature, contribute to greener choices at an individual level, and join forces with like-minded communities and groups."

They conclude: "The [climate crisis](#) is an [existential threat](#), and

fearfulness about the future cannot be fully tackled until a common united global strategy is put in place to address the root cause, [global warming](#), and to give everyone—especially the young and the most vulnerable communities—the hope of a better future."

**More information:** *The BMJ*, [blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/10/06/t ...  
-rise-of-eco-anxiety](https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/10/06/t...-rise-of-eco-anxiety)

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