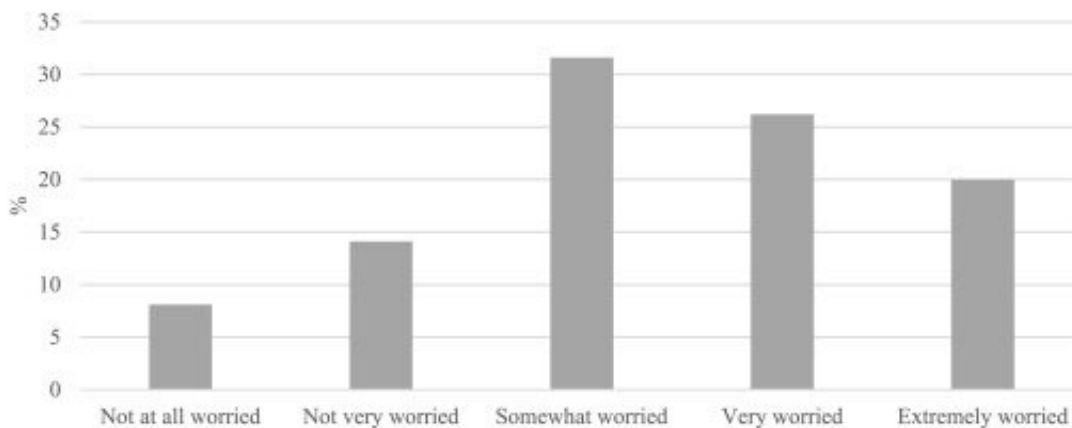


Climate anxiety an important driver for climate action, according to new study

September 2 2022



Concern about climate change, 2020 data (%). Credit: *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2022). DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101866

The first-ever detailed study of climate anxiety among the UK adult population suggests that whilst rates are currently low, people's fears about the future of the planet might be an important trigger for action when it comes to adapting our high-carbon lifestyles to become more environmentally friendly.

Interest in climate or eco-anxiety—characterized by the American Psychological Association as the chronic fear of environmental doom that comes from observing the impacts of [climate change](#)—has risen over recent years. A high-profile study published in *The Lancet*

Planetary Health in 2021 found it to be particularly prevalent among young people right across the world.

This latest study, led by a team from the Center for Climate Change and Social Transformations, also based at the University of Bath, sought the views of 1,338 UK adults over two time points (in 2020 and 2022) to delve deeper into the prevalence of climate anxiety, factors that predict it, and whether it could predict individual behavioral changes and [climate action](#).

Despite over three-quarters of the UK public saying they are worried about climate change, only 4.6% of the public reported experiencing climate anxiety in 2022 (only fractionally higher than in 2020, when 4% reported this). Younger people and those with higher generalized anxiety were more likely to experience eco-anxiety.

However, climate anxiety was not always a negative; for many it could be a motivating force for taking action to reduce emissions. This included saving energy, buying second-hand, borrowing, renting, or repurposing items. Lifestyle changes such as cutting down on red meat were not related to climate anxiety, despite being highly effective for reducing emissions.

Significantly, the study found that [media exposure](#)—for example TV images of raging storms or heatwaves—rather than direct, personal experiences of climate impacts predicted climate anxiety. The authors say there are important implications of these findings for organizations responsible for communicating climate change.

The study published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* coincides with a new briefing paper from the Center for Climate Change & Social Transformations focused on UK public preferences for low-carbon lifestyles. Its analysis suggests that [lifestyle changes](#) (for example,

reducing car use or eating less meat), are increasingly seen as both feasible and desirable.

Environmental psychologist at the University of Bath, Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh MBE, led the study. She explained that "with increasing media coverage of climate impacts, such as droughts and fires in the UK and devastating flooding in Pakistan, climate anxiety may well increase. Our findings suggest this can spur some people to take action to help tackle the issue—but we also know there are barriers to behavior change that need to be addressed through more government action."

In the paper, the authors emphasize the importance of the media as a motivating force for the lifestyle changes required as we decarbonize. They suggest that the media and [public discourse](#) about climate [anxiety](#) has the power to create a positive vision for a greener, cleaner future which is significantly less dependent on fossil fuels.

Lois Player, co-author of the study also from the Department of Psychology at the University of Bath, explained that their "results suggest that the media could play an important role in creating positive pro-environmental behavior change, but only if they carefully communicate the reality of climate change without inducing a sense of hopelessness."

More information: Lorraine Whitmarsh et al, Climate anxiety: What predicts it and how is it related to climate action?, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101866](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101866)

Caroline Hickman et al, Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey, *The Lancet Planetary Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3)

Provided by University of Bath

Citation: Climate anxiety an important driver for climate action, according to new study (2022, September 2) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-09-climate-anxiety-important-driver-action.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.