

Understanding How Climate Change Anxiety Affects the Mental Health of UK Teenagers: Systematic Review

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Introduction	Research Aim, Objectives and Question
Climate change is becoming more widely acknowledged as a mental health issue, especially for young people, in addition to an environmental and physical health emergency (Dooley et al., 2021). In the UK, teenagers are becoming increasingly aware of the potential long-term consequences of a warming planet, ranging from severe weather events to ecological collapse, and this awareness can translate into what is often termed “climate anxiety” or “eco-distress” (Wray, 2023). This study aims to systematically review evidence on how climate change anxiety influences the mental well-being of UK teenagers, exploring stress, depression and self-esteem outcomes, coping strategies, and interventions designed to support positive well-being during this pivotal developmental stage.	Research Questions: How does climate change anxiety influence the mental health of UK teenagers, including stress, depression, and self-esteem? Research Aim: This study aims to examine the impact of climate change anxiety on the mental health of teenagers in the UK, exploring the psychological outcomes, coping mechanisms, and potential interventions to support positive mental well-being. Research Objectives: - To investigate the prevalence and severity of climate change anxiety among UK teenagers. - To explore the psychological effects of climate change anxiety, including its impact on stress, depression, and self-esteem among UK teenagers. - To identify coping strategies, support systems, and interventions that can help teenagers manage climate change-related anxiety and maintain mental well-being among UK teenagers.
Prevalence of Climate Change Anxiety	
- A global survey of 10,000 young people (aged 16–25) across ten countries, including the UK, found that 59% reported being “very or extremely worried” about climate change (Hickman et al, 2021). - Among UK participants aged 16–25, approximately 49% reported being either “very worried” or “extremely worried” about climate change (RCPCH, 2023) - As per the Office for National Statistics (2022) in Great Britain, 33% of adults aged 16–29 reported feeling “very worried” about climate change, the highest proportion among all age groups. - A higher-education survey found that 90% of students said climate change had impacted their mental health or well-being (Student Minds, 2023). - According to a global youth study, 45% of participants, including UK youth, said that their attitudes about climate change had a detrimental impact on their day-to-day functioning (Hickman et al., 2021).	 What are the mental health effects of climate change? For the UK, at least in the short-term, we are most affected by increased levels of flooding and heatwaves. Of those affected by floods*: 20% had probable depression 28% had probable anxiety 36% had probable PTSD *After one year. UK-wide study (2017)

(Natural Habitat Adventures, 2025)

(Mental Health Foundation, 2017)



(Climate adaptation platform, 2025)

Rationale for the Research
- Teenagers in the UK are at a developmental stage where mental health vulnerabilities (e.g., stress, depression, self-esteem) may be susceptible to external existential threats such as climate change, yet this area remains under-researched (Rehling, 2021; Lee, 2023). - While climate anxiety has been explored globally, there is a clear gap in synthesising UK-specific evidence, particularly among teenagers rather than university-aged young adults (Ojala et al, 2021). - Exploring how climate anxiety interacts with psychological outcomes such as stress, depression, and self-esteem will clarify whether it functions as a risk factor for poor mental health or a motivator for adaptive coping and engagement (Thoma et al, 2021). - Identifying coping mechanisms and interventions suited to UK teenagers will help mental health services, schools, and youth programmes better integrate climate-related distress management into everyday practice (Daeninck et al, 2023). - As public health and social-care systems increasingly encounter climate-linked mental health challenges, synthesised evidence from this review will provide policy-relevant insights for early intervention and youth resilience building (Meo et al, 2025).

Research Impact
- The findings will empower teenagers and their support networks (parents, teachers, youth workers) to recognise and normalise symptoms of climate anxiety, decreasing stigma and promoting earlier access to support (Crandon et al, 2022). - Evidence-based insights will inform the design of targeted curricula and well-being programmes that build resilience and awareness around climate-related mental health (Birrell et al, 2018). - The review will support practitioners (e.g., CAMHS, school counsellors) by highlighting how climate anxiety can intersect with stress, depression, and self-esteem issues, informing tailored intervention strategies (Singh et al, 2022). - Synthesised data will provide an evidence base for resource allocation and service design, ensuring that youth mental health initiatives adequately address climate-related anxiety (Meo et al, 2025). - The research will contribute to national youth mental health and climate adaptation strategies, advocating for an integrated climate-health-education approach (Clemens et al, 2022).

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