ECO ANXIETY REPORT

THE UNITED KINGDOM

2023

iRIS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Note from Iris Sustainable Development

Anxiety relating to a multitude of ecological crises, or eco-anxiety, is a subject of growing research significance. The main idea of the first report series is to establish an international overview of eco-anxiety rates in 20 countries utilizing the HEAS scale and correlate these rates with variables of geographical location (urban, rural), education as well as the type of experiencing climate crisis (indirectly via the media or public discourse).

More precisely, the main objectives of this report series is to:
- create an international overview of eco-anxiety rates in 20 countries
- contribute to the growing body of knowledge around to what extent the climate crisis affects mental health identifying possible differentiation on eco-anxiety determinants
- raise awareness on the impact of climate crisis on mental health

The target group of the UK national report are citizens of the UK and/or people (ages 18-50) that are/have been experiencing climate change in the country.

Climate change impacts in the UK

The UK's climate is maritime, moist and temperate, with a moderate annual temperature range. Average annual precipitation in the UK typically ranges from approximately 800 mm to 1,400 mm. The UK climate is heavily influenced by its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf Stream/North Atlantic Drift which brings warm water into high northern latitudes. Prevailing winds are westerly, thus UK regional climates vary with distance from the Atlantic as well as topography. Continental influences are most strongly seen in the southeast of the country. (World Bank, 2023)

Greenhouse gas emissions

Despite rises in some emissions as the UK continued to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022 saw a fall in greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, largely due to a reduction in fuel use to heat buildings. This will largely be because 2022 was considerably warmer than 2021 and higher energy prices may also have been a factor, particularly towards the end of the year. Carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions in the UK are provisionally estimated to have decreased by 2.4% in 2022 from 2021, to 331.5 million tonnes (Mt), and total greenhouse gas emissions by 2.2% to 417.1 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent ($MtCO_2e$). Compared to 2019, the most recent pre-pandemic year, 2022 CO_2 emissions are down 7.5% and total greenhouse gas emissions are down 7.4%. Total greenhouse gas emissions were 48.7% lower than they were in 1990. This decrease in 2022 is primarily due to the reduction in gas for heating buildings, as the weather was warmer than in 2021. Higher energy prices may have also caused people to reduce their energy use. CO_2 emissions from the residential sector fell 11.1 Mt (16.5%) in 2022. Comparatively, overall CO_2 emissions in the UK only fell 8.1 Mt, with a notable rise in emissions from transport (4.2 Mt). The sector with the largest increase in UK emissions was transport, up 34% in 2022 compared with 2021, following a fall of 28% in 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic and a 9% decrease in 2021. The rise in transport emissions came in the first half of the year, following reduced travel in the same period in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions (United Kingdom Government, 2022).

Extreme weather events

The UK generally experiences warm summers and cool winters. Only rarely do we face the extremes of heat or cold common in other climates.

There is increasing evidence that things are changing. Heatwaves, storms and flooding, wildfires and even extremely cold snaps are happening unexpectedly.

While scientists are often reluctant to put single extreme weather events down to climate change, it's becoming clear that new patterns of extreme weather are emerging. These include how severe extreme weather events are, how often they happen, and how much impact they have.

As the climate warms, flood risk will go up, because it'll rain more heavily. This is partly because, generally speaking, warmer air can hold more moisture – and that means more intense rainfall. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change believes that the UK will receive about 10 percent more rainfall on average per year by 2100 compared to 1986–2005.

For the UK, heatwaves are considered extreme beyond the 30ºC mark. A record high temperature of 40.3ºC was recorded in Lincolnshire on 19 July 2022, with many more similarly high temperatures countrywide. This broke a previous record of 38.7ºC in Cambridge in July 2019 Greenpeace UK. (2023).

Source: https://www.euractiv.com/section/air-pollution/opinion/clean-air-for-everyone-poland-challenges-smog/

Survey results

LOCATION

Urban Area 77%

Rural Area 23%

EDUCATION

Elementary School Degree 0%
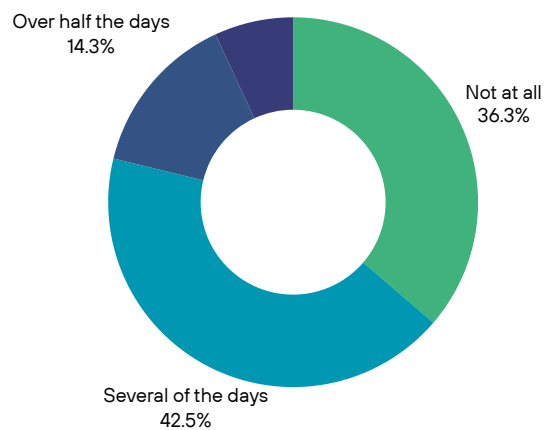
High School's Degree 0%
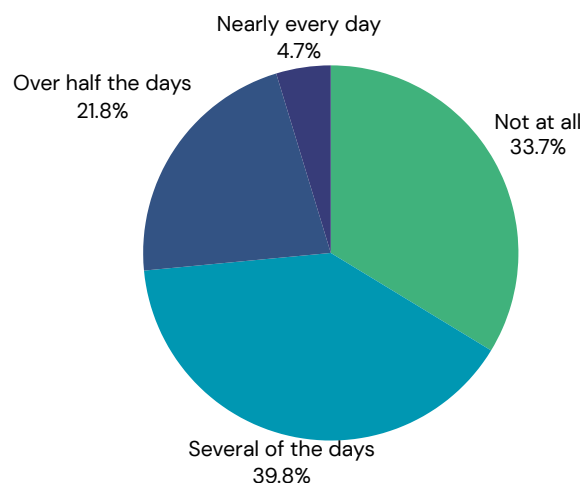
Bachelor's Degree 44%

Master's Degree or higher 66%

"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?
Response scale: 0 = not at all, 1 = several of the days, 2 = over half the days, 3 = nearly every day.

Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge

Over half the days
14.3%

Not at all
36.3%

Several of the days
42.5%

Not being able to stop or control worrying

Nearly every day
4.7%

Over half the days
21.8%

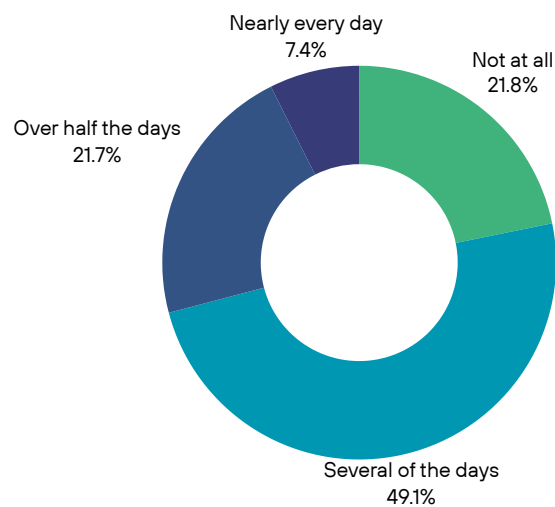Not at all
33.7%

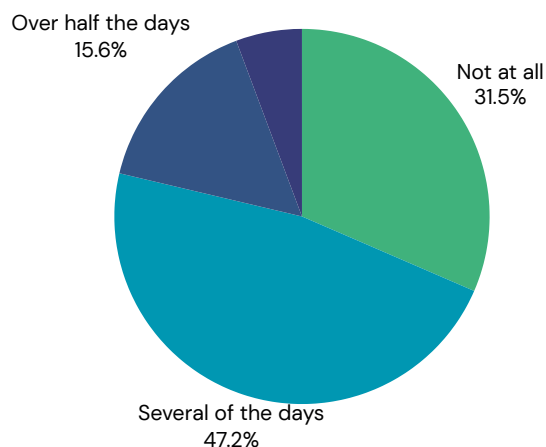Several of the days
39.8%

Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?
Response scale: 0 = not at all, 1 = several of the days, 2 = over half the days, 3 = nearly every day.
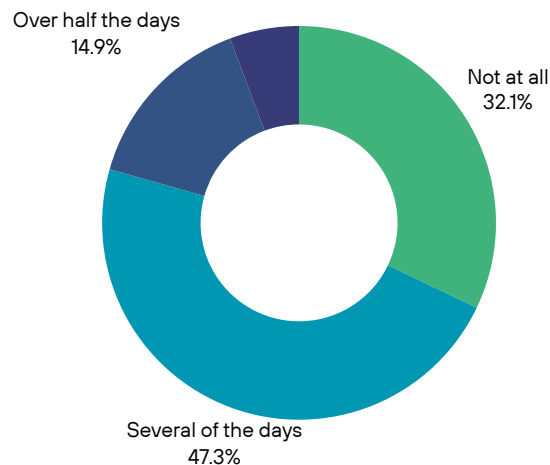
Worrying too much

Nearly every day
7.4%

Not at all
21.8%

Over half the days
21.7%

Several of the days
49.1%

Feeling afraid

Over half the days
15.6%

Not at all
31.5%

Several of the days
47.2%

"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?"

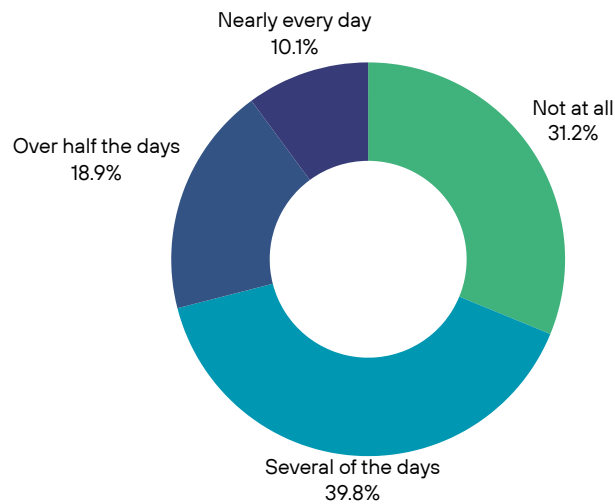## Unable to stop thinking about future climate change and other global environmental problems

Over half the days
14.9%

Not at all
32.1%

Several of the days
47.3%

Unable to stop thinking about past events related to climate change
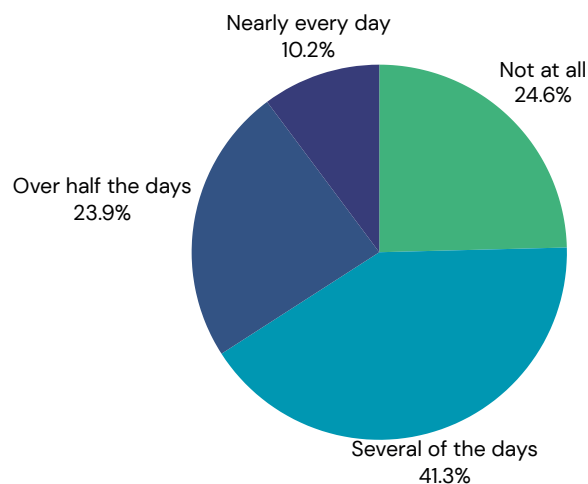
Nearly every day
10.2%

Not at all
24.6%

Over half the days
23.9%

Several of the days
41.3%

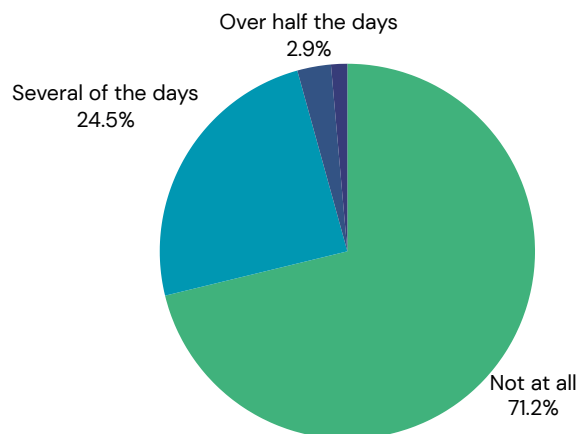*"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?*

## Unable to stop thinking about losses to the environment

Nearly every day
10.1%

Not at all
31.2%

Over half the days
18.9%

Several of the days
39.8%

Difficulty sleeping

Over half the days
2.9%

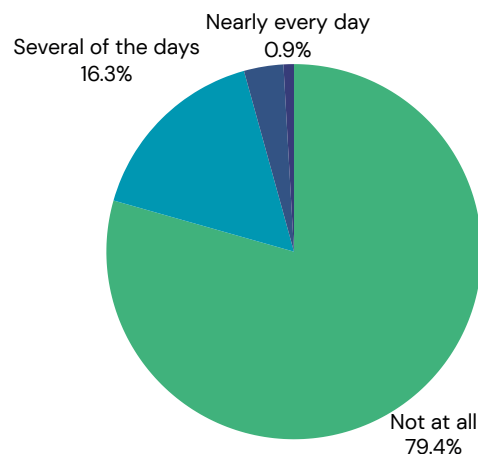Several of the days
24.5%

Not at all
71.2%

Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?

## Difficulty enjoying social situations with family and friends

Over half the days
1.3%

Several of the days
21.9%

Not at all
76.1%
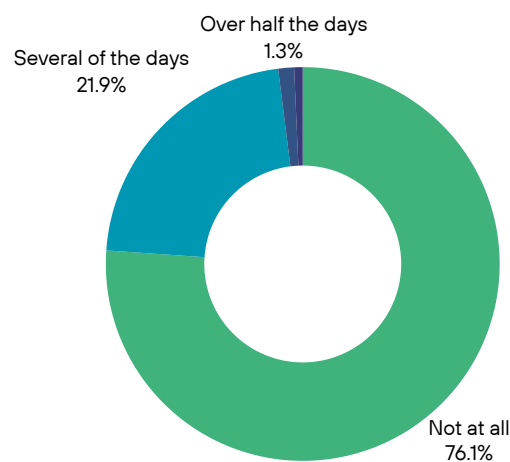
Difficulty working and/or studying

Nearly every day
0.9%

Several of the days
16.3%

Not at all
79.4%

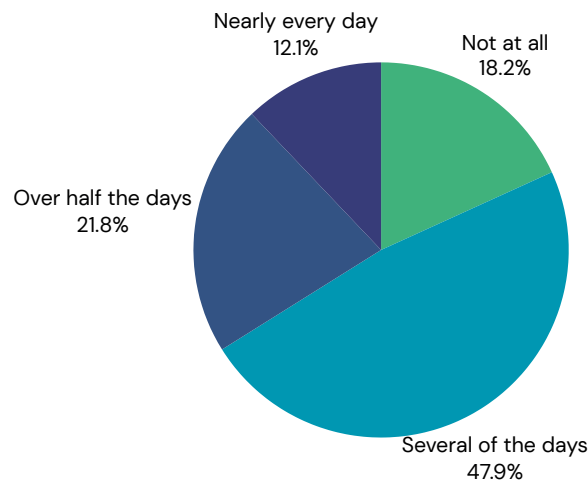*"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?*

## Feeling anxious about the impact of your personal behaviours on the earth

Nearly every day
12.3%

Not at all
10.2%

Over half the days
22.3%

Several of the days
55.2%
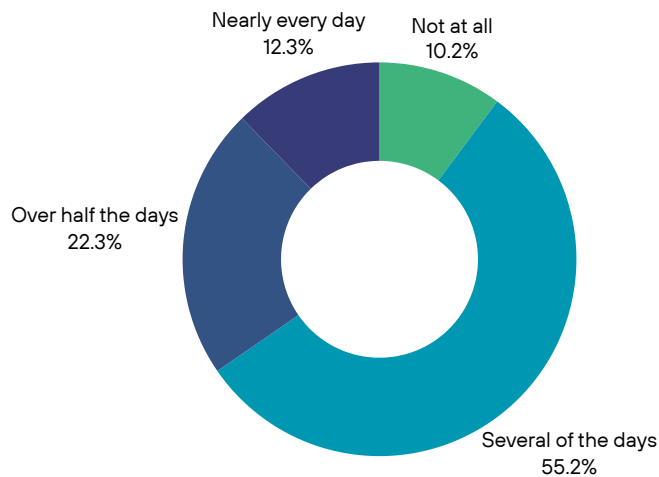
Feeling anxious about your personal responsibility to help address environmental problems

Nearly every day
12.1%

Not at all
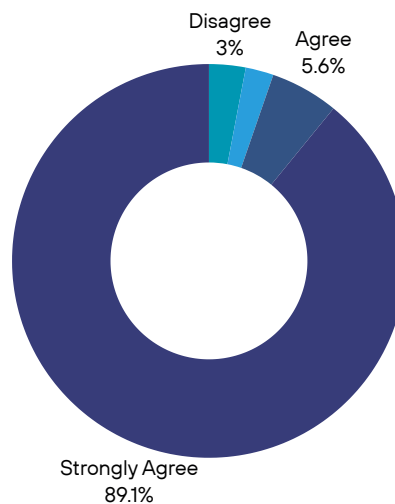18.2%

Over half the days
21.8%

Several of the days
47.9%

"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?"

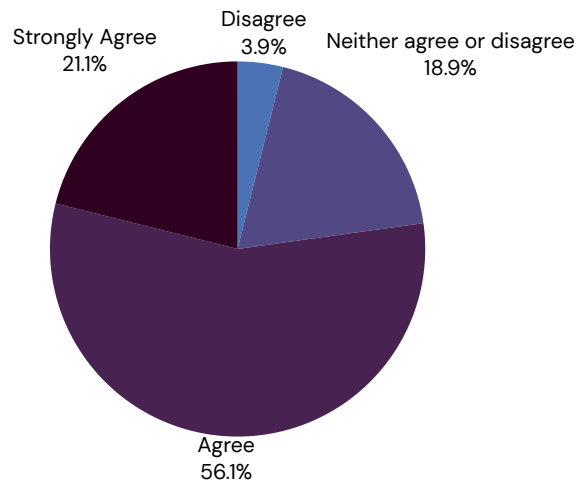## Feeling anxious that your personal behaviours will do little to help fix the problem

Nearly every day
15.6%

Not at all
13.5%

Over half the days
29.8%

Several of the day
41.1%
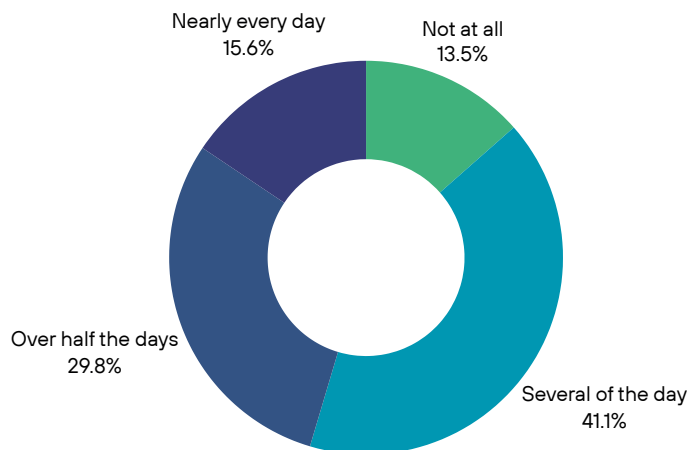
Beliefs about Climate Change

Climate change is real

Disagree
3%

Agree
5.6%

Strongly Agree
89.1%

Beliefs about Climate Change

Climate change is caused by humans

Strongly Agree
21.1%

Disagree
3.9%

Neither agree or disagree
18.9%

Agree
56.1%

Climate change is reversible

Strongly Disagree
2.8%

Disagree
32.2%

Strongly agree
47.8%

Agree
12.6%
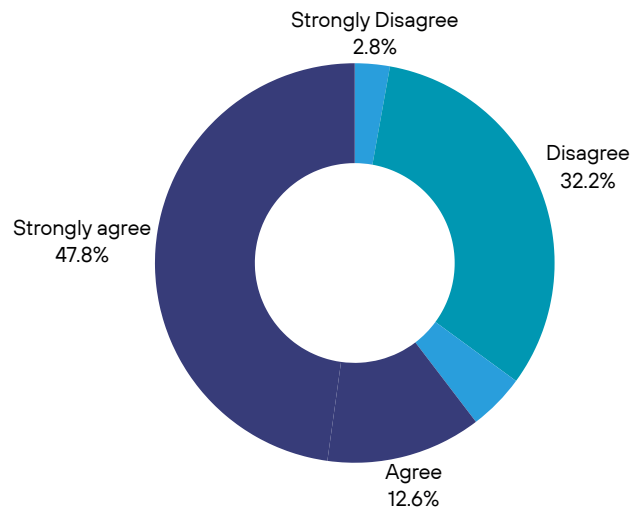
Survey results: Beliefs about climate change
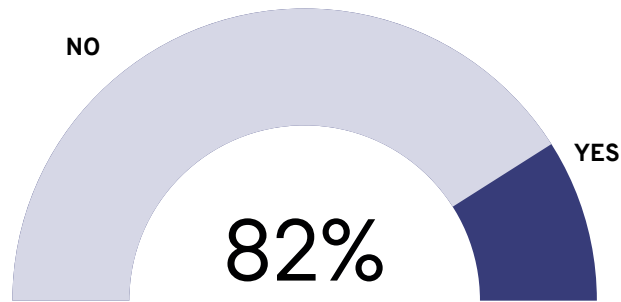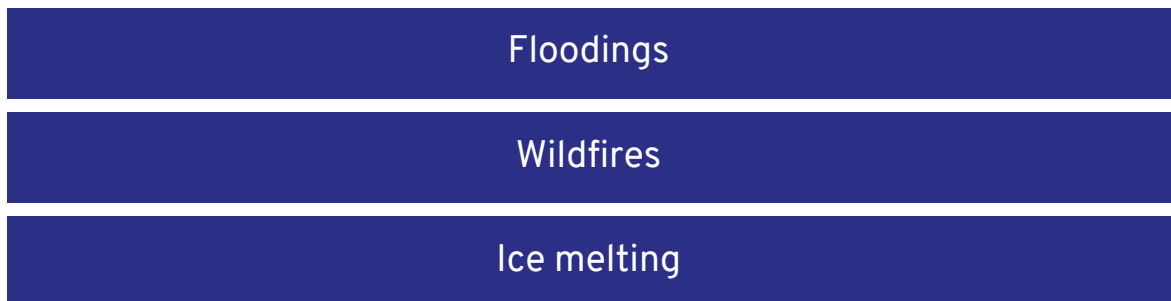
Do you have direct experience of environmental crisis?

NO

YES

82%

I am experiencing climate crisis indirectly via the media or public discource

YES

NO

95%

Which climate disaster made you feel nervous (in your country or globally), if any

Floodings

Wildfires

Ice melting

Key Conclusions

Our research reveals a notable prevalence of eco-anxiety among the UK population, reporting varying degrees of eco-anxiety. This underscores the significance of the issue and the need for further investigation and intervention.

In terms of the interrelation between eco-anxiety and specific variables significant differences in eco-anxiety rates were observed across various demographics. Notably, the geographical location of participants was strongly interrelated with eco-anxiety. It is important that the 77% of the respondents are urban residents and they are exhibited higher levels of eco-anxiety compared to their rural counterparts. Additionally, while a slight connection with education was observed, we address that eco-anxiety can be experienced via media and public discourse, since the 95% has expressed that is experiencing eco-anxiety indirectly. This indicates that the media and information consumption play a substantial role in shaping eco-anxiety levels since participants who reported frequent exposure to alarming environmental news or content experienced higher levels of eco-anxiety. Simultaneously, the study found a strong interrelation between eco-anxiety and heightened concerns about environmental issues. Respondents who expressed high levels of eco-anxiety consistently cited factors and events such as wildfires, ice melting, and floodings as major sources of distress.

The findings of this research underscore the urgency for policymakers to address eco-anxiety as a public health concern. Developing sustainable environmental policies, educational campaigns, and psychological support services can help mitigate eco-anxiety and its associated mental health issues. This study provides a foundation for future research on eco-anxiety. However, further investigations into the long-term consequences of eco-anxiety, the effectiveness of interventions, and potential policy changes are essential for a comprehensive understanding of this emerging issue.

In conclusion, our research highlights the significant eco-anxiety rates in the UK and the need for multidisciplinary efforts to address this concern. Addressing eco-anxiety is not only crucial for the mental well-being of individuals but also for the sustainable future.

Disclaimer:
This report provides an intention of the eco-anxiety rates in the country and cannot be generalised since the survey is not responded by a representative sample comparing to the country's population.

References

Greenpeace UK. (2023). Climate Change and Extreme Weather. Greenpeace UK. Retrieved from https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/challenges/climate-change/climate-change-extreme-weather/

Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2022). Greenhouse Gas Intensity: Provisional Estimates for the UK - 2022. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/greenhousegasin tensityprovisionalestimatesuk/provisionalestimates2022

United Kingdom Government. (2022). Provisional UK Emissions Statistics 2022. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attach ment_data/file/1147372/2022_Provisional_emissions_statistics_report.pdf

World Bank. (2023). Climate Data Historical - United Kingdom. Climate Knowledge Portal. Retrieved from https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/united-kingdom/climate-data-historical#:~:text=The%20UK's%20climate%20is%20maritime,800%20mm%20to%201%2C400%20mm.

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