ECO ANXIETY REPORT

SWEDEN

2023

iRIS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Table of Contents

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

Climate change impacts in Sweden

Sweden's proximity to the North Atlantic and prevailing south-westerly to westerly winds result in a climate that is mild in the winter months, but the northernmost part of the country has a sub-Arctic climate with long, cold and snowy winters. In the period 1961-90 the mean temperature in January was 0°C in southernmost Sweden, while the coldest northern valleys had 17°C. The maximum daily mean July temperature was approximately +17°C in south-eastern Sweden and just over 10°C in the north. Passing low-pressure systems bring precipitation that is fairly copious all year round, but heaviest in the summer and autumn. Annual precipitation is some 1,000 mm. Since most low-pressure systems move in across the country from the west or south-west, the western parts of Sweden receive the most precipitation (World Bank, 2023)

Greenhouse gas emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions from the entire Swedish economy amount to 12.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents in the fourth quarter of 2022. This corresponds to an emission reduction of 3 percent compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year. During the same period, GDP is largely unchanged (decreased just by 0.2 percent).

The emission reductions compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year are mainly occurred in the manufacturing industry (NACE C10-C33), in the industries of (including electricity, gas, heat production, water, sewage and waste treatment NACE D35-E39) and from households' transport fuel use. At the same time, greenhouse gas emissions from the transport industry (NACE H49-H53) increase.

[Shutterstock/Charlotte K] Euractiv

Climate change impacts in Sweden

Extreme weather events

Sweden has witnessed a captivating dance of extreme weather events over the past decade, painting a vivid picture of climate change on its pristine landscapes. From record-breaking heatwaves to changing winter patterns, the nation grapples with the nuances of a changing climate against the backdrop of its diverse ecosystems.

One striking chapter in Sweden's recent climate story unfolded in 2018 when the nation faced an extraordinary summer heatwave. Temperature records soared across the country, surpassing 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) in the Arctic Circle. The prolonged heat and drought conditions led to widespread wildfires, particularly in regions like Jämtland and Västmanland. The fires not only posed immediate threats to communities and wildlife but also sparked conversations about the increasing frequency of such extreme heat events in traditionally cooler climates.

Conversely, the iconic winters of Sweden have undergone transformations, with changing precipitation patterns impacting the traditional snowscape. In recent years, Stockholm, the capital, experienced winters with reduced snow cover and milder temperatures. This has implications for winter sports, traditional activities, and the intricate ecological balance in Sweden's boreal forests, where snow cover plays a crucial role in insulating the ground.

In the summer of 2018, a large number of wildfires (primarily forest fires) occurred throughout much of Sweden. According to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, they are the most serious in the country in modern history. More than 100 mm of rain fell in 2 hours in parts of central Sweden on 18 August causing damaging flash floods in the counties of Dalarna and Gävleborg. The Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI) said the city of Gävle in Gästrikland Region recorded 161.6 mm of rain in 24 hours to 18 August, with 101mm of that total falling in just 2 hours between 00:00 and 02:00 on 18 August. The previous highest 24 hour total for the region was 125.8 mm set in 20217. (Floodist, 2021)

Survey results

LOCATION

Urban Area 72%

Rural Area 28%

EDUCATION

Elementary School Degree 0%

High School's Degree 11%

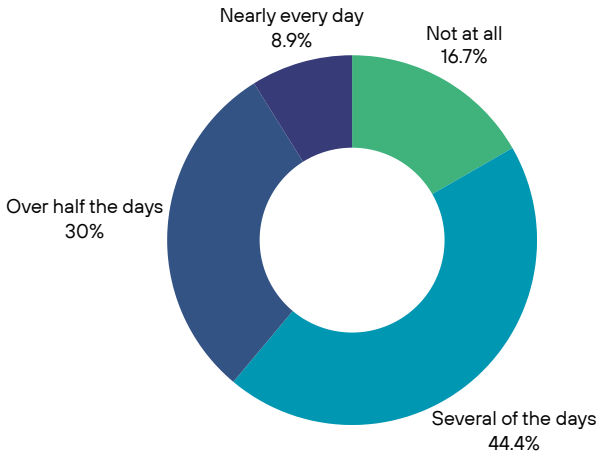
Bachelor's Degree 28%

Master's Degree or higher 61%

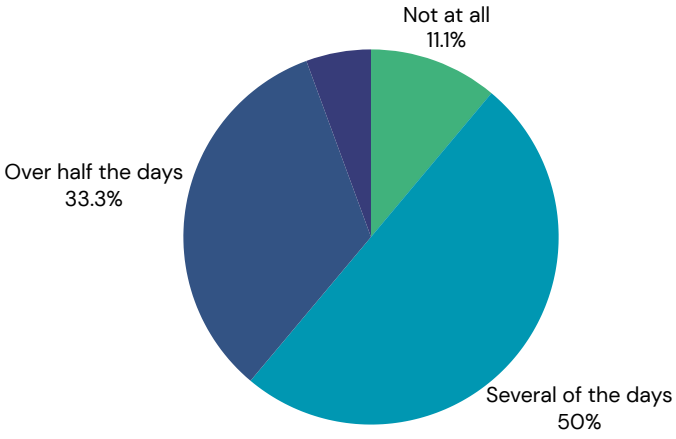
Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"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.

Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge



Not being able to stop or control worrying



Survey results: The Hogg Scale

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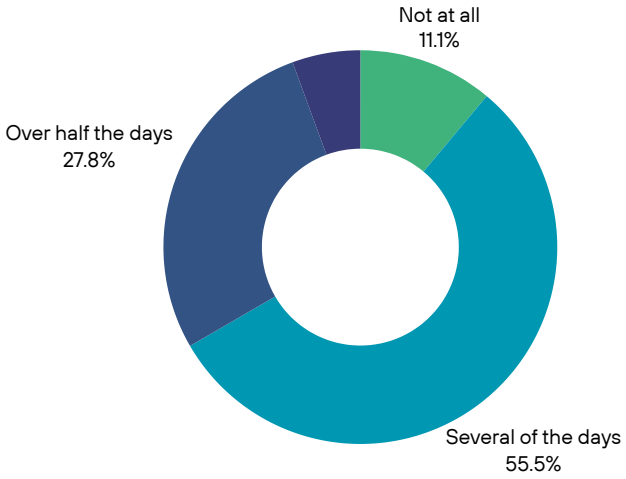
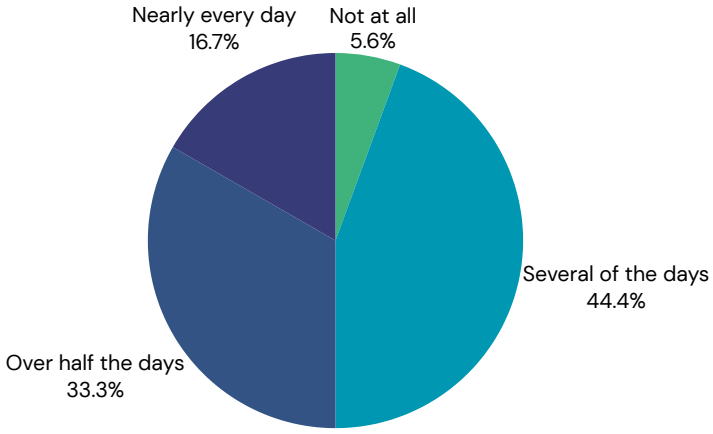
Worrying too much



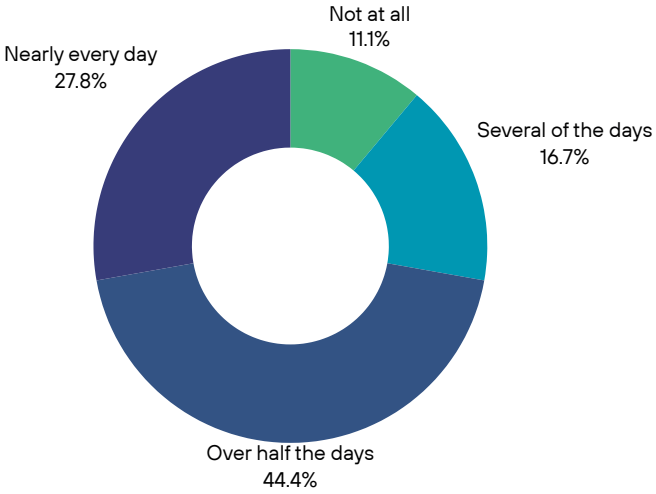
Feeling afraid



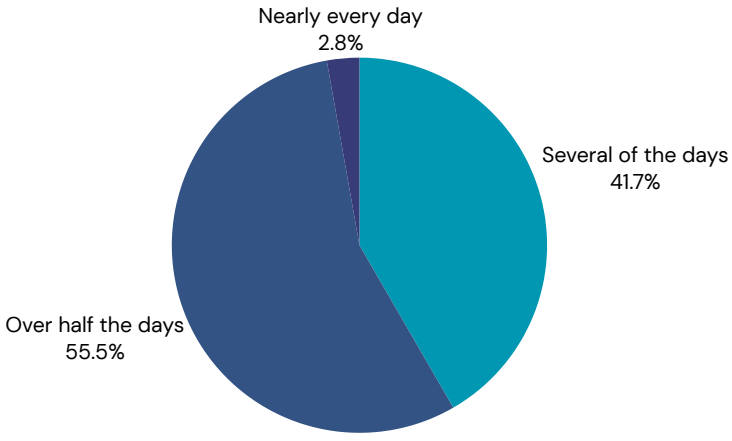
Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"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)?

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



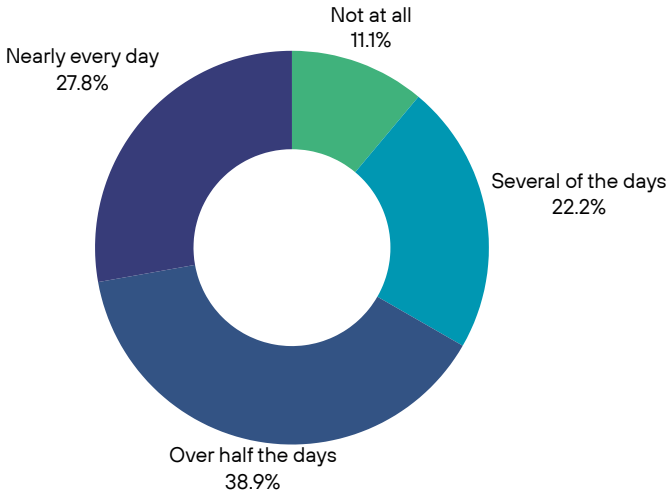
Unable to stop thinking about past events related to climate change



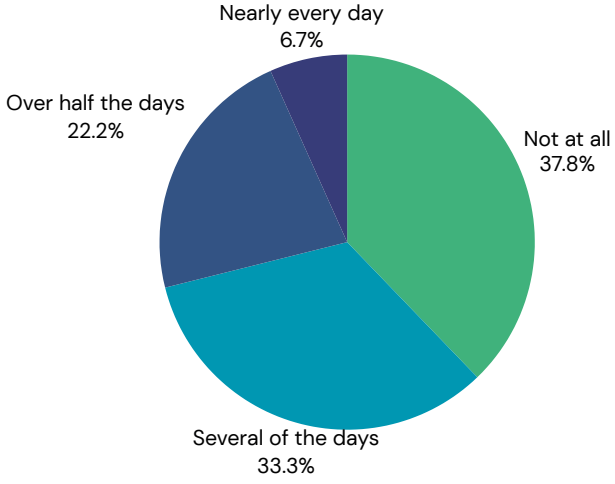
Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"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)?

Unable to stop thinking about losses to the environment



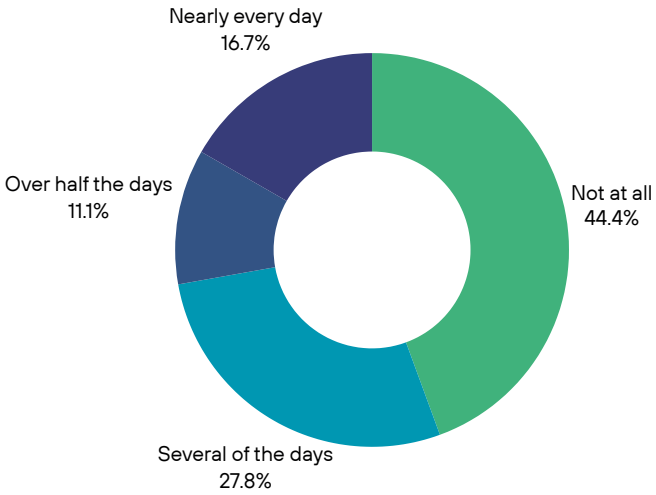
Difficulty sleeping



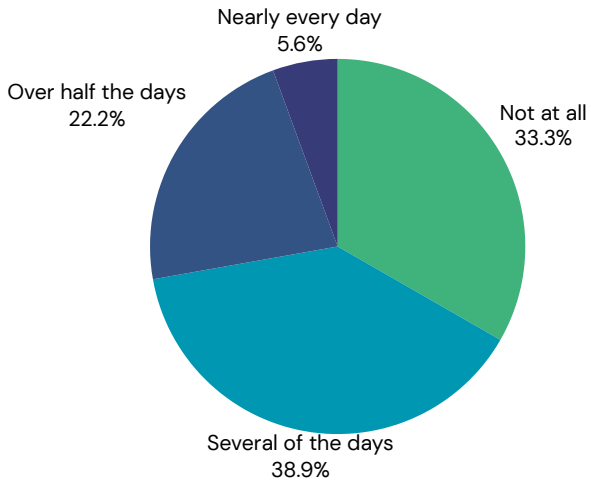
Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"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



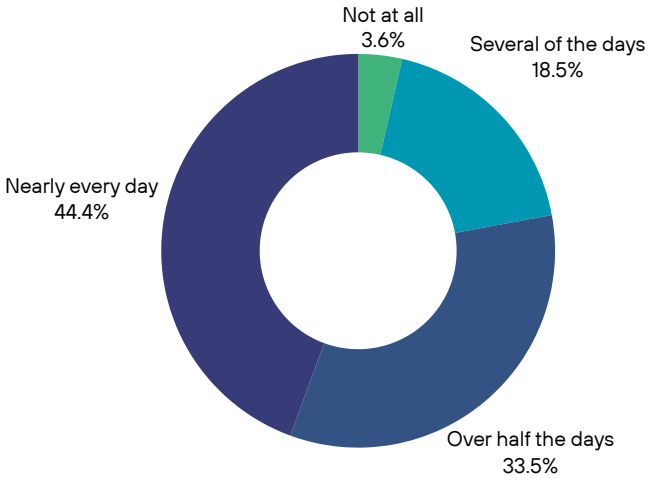
Difficulty working and/or studying



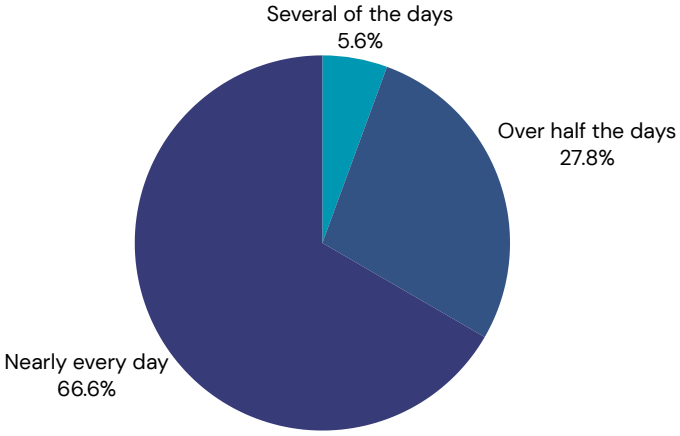
Survey results: The Hogg Scale

"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)?

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



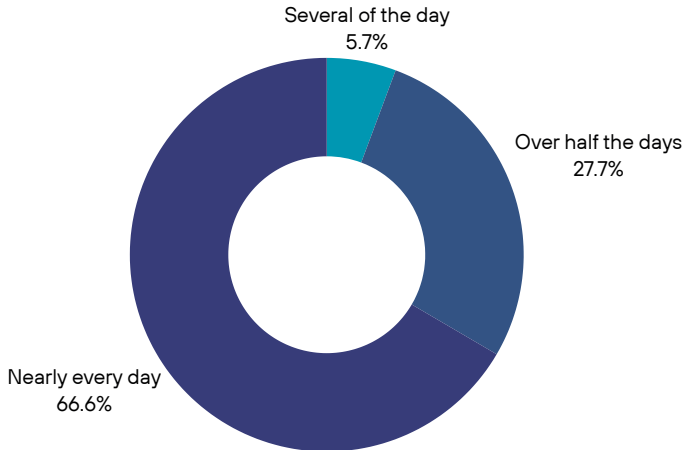
Feeling anxious about your personal responsibility to help address environmental problems



Survey results: The Hogg Scale and Beliefs about climate change

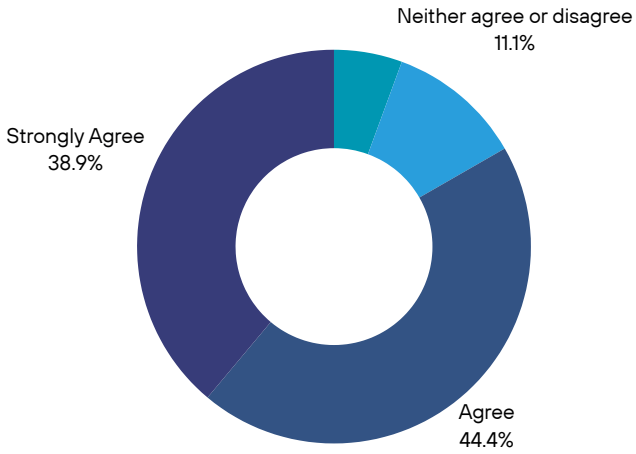
"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change and other global environmental conditions (e.g., global warming, ecological degradation, resource depletion, species extinction, ozone hole, pollution of the oceans, deforestation)?

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



Beliefs about Climate Change

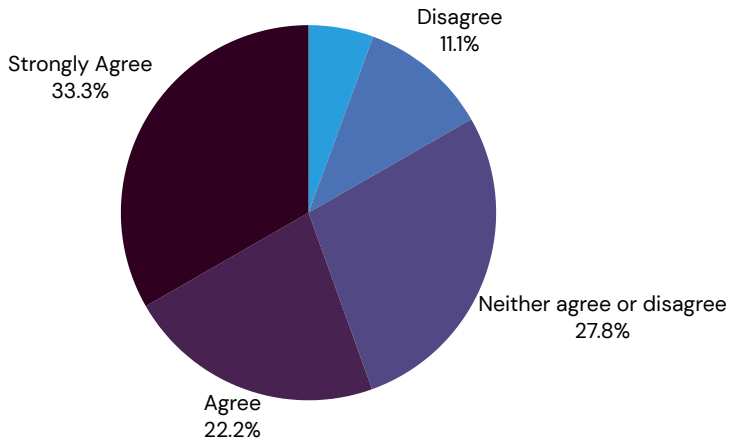
Climate change is real



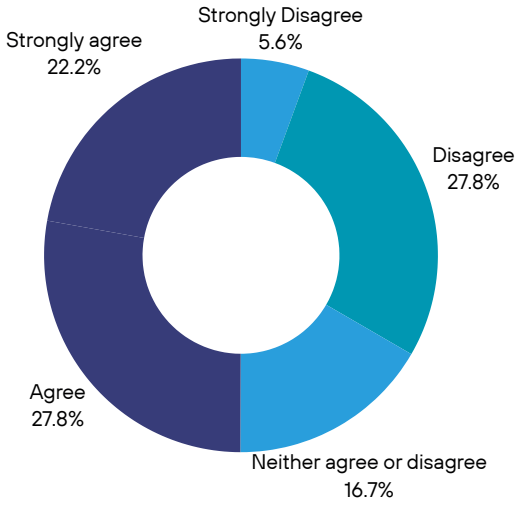
Survey results: Beliefs about climate change

Beliefs about Climate Change

Climate change is caused by humans

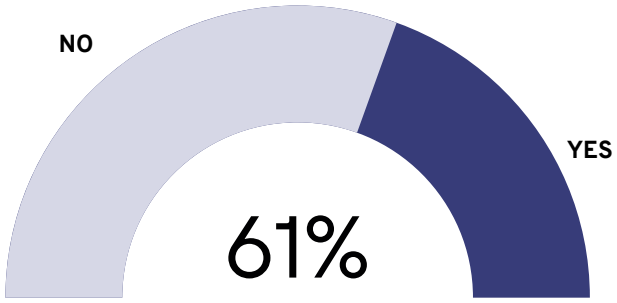


Climate change is reversible



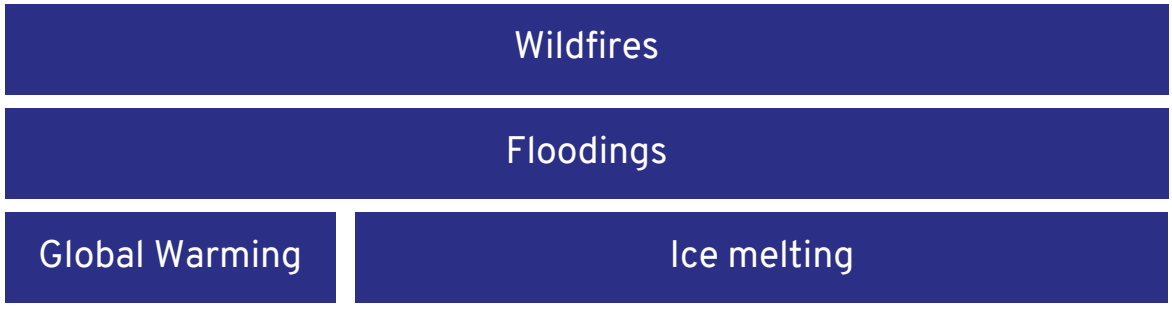
Survey results: Beliefs about climate change

Do you have direct experience of environmental crisis?



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

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



Key Conclusions

Our research reveals a notable prevalence of eco-anxiety among the Swedish 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 interplay 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 linked with eco-anxiety. It is important that the 72% of the respondents are urban residents and they are exhibited higher levels of eco-anxiety compared to their rural counterparts. Additionally, while a slight interconnection with education was observed, we address that eco-anxiety can be experienced via media and public discourse, since the 89% 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 interplay 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, floodings, and global warming 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 Sweden 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

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