

# Study links 'climate distress' to poor mental health, may also inspire action

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Distress over climate change causes a lot of negative emotions in youth in the United Kingdom, but it may also motivate them to take positive actions for the environment, reports a new study by a research team

from Imperial College London and the University of Queensland, published August 23 in the open access journal *PLOS Global Public Health*.

Many people, especially youth, are increasingly worried about climate change. In the new study, researchers surveyed [young adults](#) in the United Kingdom, aged 16 to 24, about their experience of "climate distress." They asked about their general mental health and well-being, their distress over the changing climate, how climate change has positively or negatively affected their life and whether they are involved in pro-environmental and climate actions.

The study's findings suggest that existing [mental health issues](#) may make a person more vulnerable to climate distress. About 10% of the respondents reported that they were highly distressed and worried about how climate change would impact their future more frequently than any other issue. Though few of these individuals had experienced climate extremes, they reported being upset by environmental degradation of places they cared about, frustration over the lack of action on climate change, a lack of personal agency, concern over their future and feelings of guilt and shame.

However, highly distressed respondents were also more likely to report finding meaning and fulfillment from engaging in [climate action](#). Both [positive emotions](#), such as hope, and negative ones, such as anger and frustration were linked to climate activism, while guilt, shame, sadness and fear were associated with reduced action-taking.

Overall, the findings present a more nuanced picture of climate distress in [young people](#) in the U.K. The study's authors call for further research into this phenomenon to understand why climate [distress](#) motivates some people to take action, and drives others to inaction. They also emphasize the importance of developing tools that will help young people to thrive

and to safely and effectively mitigate the climate crisis.

The authors add, "Even in the midst of the global pandemic, and despite being spared the worst of climate impacts, young UK residents were distressed about climate change. Our work suggests that emotions linked to climate change may inspire action-taking, which has implications for how we communicate about [climate change](#). Our findings also highlight the need for targeted, climate-aware psychosocial support to sustain young people's climate engagement and mental health simultaneously."

**More information:** Vercammen A et al, Psycho-social factors associated with climate distress, hope and behavioural intentions in young UK residents, *PLOS Global Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0001938](#)

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