

Nearly half of mental health practitioners say they are unprepared to help clients cope with climate change

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Many mental health counselors feel ill-equipped to help their clients deal with psychological issues around climate change, according to a new

study published in *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*.

Researchers and [climate experts](#) predict a sharp rise in mental health struggles—including grief and hopelessness—as [climate change](#) fuels increasing numbers of severe fires, floods, droughts and displacements. A team led by counseling educator Ryan F. Reese, Ph.D., of Oregon State University-Cascades, sought to clarify the degree to which counselors felt prepared for and committed to addressing climate change in their work.

Reese and colleagues Jaqueline M. Swank, Ph.D., of the University of Missouri, and Debbie C. Sturm, Ph.D., of James Madison University, administered questionnaires to 382 licensed mental health care providers—including psychologists, school counselors and [social workers](#)—in the U.S.

Only 5% of the participants reported being trained to address climate change with clients, and only 9% said they had educational resources to help clients cope with climate-related issues. Nearly 46% reported feeling unequipped to handle climate change issues in their practices. The study also showed that counselors who actively work to mitigate climate change and who feel connected to community and nature were more likely to view climate change [counseling](#) as a professional mandate.

Reese and his colleagues say the mental health care fields may need to provide professionals with more educational resources around climate change and also address counselors' own awareness and attitudes about [climate](#) issues.

More information: Ryan F. Reese et al, A national survey of helping professionals on climate change and counseling, *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/johc.12211](https://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12211)

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