

Chapter 11

The Phenomenon of Eco-Anxiety and Distress Related to Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

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ABSTRACT

Eco-anxiety refers to chronic fear of environmental doom due to climate change and ecological harm. It stems from lived experiences, media coverage, scientific reports, and government inaction. Climate anxiety is rising, especially among youth. Exposure to climate disasters and species/habitat loss can lead to climate grief. Eco-anxiety can manifest as fatalism, avoidance, activism, or compulsions. It reflects conflict between protecting nature and feelings of helplessness. Chronic climate distress heightens risks of depression, PTSD, panic, and substance abuse. Addressing eco-anxiety requires climate education and communication, mental health resources, government climate action, and research on coping strategies. Recognition of eco-anxiety establishes climate mitigation as imperative for collective psychological wellbeing.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change poses a significant worldwide concern, exerting diverse impacts on both the environment and human health. Several ramifications of climate change on mental health. The escalation of stress, anxiety, and depression can be attributed to the prevailing uncertainty and apprehension regarding forthcoming circumstances, the loss of livelihoods, residences, and loved ones, as well as exposure to traumatic incidents such as disasters, conflicts, and violence. Survivors of severe weather phenomena such as hurricanes, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires face an augmented susceptibility to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and suicide. Elevated temperatures, water scarcity, food insecurity, and social instability contribute to heightened levels of aggression and violence. The disruption of health systems, infrastructure, and communication networks results in diminished accessibility to mental health services and support. The erosion of social and cultural links, loss of identity and sense of belonging, and lower quality of life can lead to a decrease in coping capacity and resilience (Clayton et al., 2017).

UNDERSTANDING ECO-ANXIETY

The term “Eco-anxiety” is employed to delineate the psychological anguish and anxiety that individuals may undergo as a consequence of their apprehensions around the environmental catastrophe and climate change. The interconnectedness of ecological and mental well-being, emphasizes the importance of recognizing and places eco-anxiety as a valid psychological concern (Clayton et al., 2017).

Eco-anxiety, as delineated by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) as a persistent apprehension regarding environmental cataclysm resulting from the perceived irreversible consequences of climate change and the concomitant apprehension for one’s own and future generations’ well-being, is a logical reaction to the climate crisis. Climate-related disasters have a significant impact on individuals across many age groups, with a special emphasis on those who are directly affected by such events. Many individuals in the younger generation experience feelings of frustration, anger, and pessimism as a result of observing environmental destruction and perceived insufficient efforts by those in positions of authority. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that eco-anxiety can also function as a productive and adaptive pro-environmental reaction for individuals who redirect their discomfort towards constructive endeavors such as campaigning for policy modifications, endorsing sustainable practices, and engaging in community initiatives (Verplanken, B. et al 2020) .

The phenomenon under consideration is distinguished by emotions of powerlessness, apprehension, or concern regarding the prospects of the globe, the

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