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The Impact of Climate Change News on Mental Health of Youth: The Rise of Eco-Anxiety in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is no longer a scientific issue; it's quickly becoming a mental health crisis, especially for Pakistan's younger generation. While news headlines scream about melting glaciers, deadly floods, and increasing temperatures, young minds are quietly soaking up a never ending flow of fear, uncertainty, and hopelessness. This study explores the psychological effect of such news, uncovering the phenomenon of eco-anxiety, a growing emotional condition of fear of ecological apocalypse and helplessness over the future. Backed by two broad objectives, the study examines the effect of climate change news on the mental health of Pakistani youth and how they attempt to cope. It also raises two research questions to examine the association between media exposure to climate related issues and emotional distress. Adopting a quantitative research approach with a survey design, the research is gathered data from a purposive sample of 300 young people from Pakistan. A structured questionnaire is used to assess their levels of news exposure, anxiety symptoms, and coping. The data are analyzed employing pie charts to illustrate emotional trends and psychological impacts. The research is revolving around two hypotheses, one concerning the frequency of climate news exposure and its connection with anxiety, and the other concerning the media framing effect on youth mental health. A vast majority of respondents record moderate to severe degrees of eco-anxiety, and are instigated by persistent exposure to scary and alarming climate news. Fear, anxiety, and hopelessness characterize the mood. The report concludes that while media coverage is required for the purpose of informing, it's biased, apocalyptic presentation may be damaging to more than it serves. It recommends that news outlets move toward solution oriented reporting, and climate education and mental health services become integral to the plans for reaching young people. Only by reversing the narrative from fear to empowerment can we allow the next generation to manage and act on hope.

Introduction

Climate change is moved from a scientific problem to a global international crisis with far reaching impacts on the environment and human health. While the environmental effects of climate change are well documented, its psychological effects, particularly on the youth are increasingly finding themselves in the limelight. With climate deterioration accelerating and climatic extreme events becoming more frequent, the mental and psychological well-being of individuals, especially the young generation, is under increasing strain. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public awareness, opinions, and emotional responses to climate change. While scientific research and policy frameworks remain central, the media significantly influences public perception and engagement with climate-related issues (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007). Media portrayals not only frame how the problem is perceived but also impact the willingness of the public to act (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009). In Pakistan, which is highly climate disaster susceptible, children and adolescents are subject to an overwhelming amount of climate change news on TV, social media, and other media outlets. This constant exposure to upsetting news, which focuses on worst case scenarios, has given rise to the phenomenon of eco-anxiety, a term used to describe the stress, fear, and distress caused by environmental and planetary doomsday concerns. Eco-anxiety is not a sporadic worry, it is a sustained mindset, one that is particularly prevalent among young people who are not only concerned about their own near term futures but also the future of the world. In Pakistan, where young people comprise a large proportion of the population, the psychological effects of reports on climate cannot be ignored. However, little study has been undertaken on the direct impact of viewing media coverage of climate change on the mental health of young Pakistanis. The objective of this study is to fill this gap by analyzing the emotional and psychological impacts of climate change news on Pakistani youth and particularly focusing on the development of eco-anxiety. The research probes the connections between viewing habits of media and distress of mental health and how young people cope with the anxiety caused by the stories of climate change. By examining these psychological effects, the study hopes to inform media practice and mental health policy so that climate reporting is done responsibly.

Background

The mass media industry includes a diverse array of communicators, journalists, editors, publishers, and broadcasters working across platforms such as newspapers, TV, radio, and digital media (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007). Media narratives may also emerge through cultural forms like theatre, poetry, and political debates. Over the last two decades, extensive research has explored how mass media influences public engagement with environmental challenges. For example, Bauer (1995) examined how media supported social movements around nuclear power, while recent studies focus on the evolving role of social media in communicating climate science (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2014). The climate crisis is vastly becoming one of the most key global crises, with far reaching implications beyond the environment. Although the physical impacts of sea level rise, weather patterns, and habitat loss are well understood, the psychological and emotional toll of climate change are recognized as a significant issue, particularly among vulnerable populations such as children. As the globe struggles with increasing environmental anxiety, young people are not only confronted with the physical impacts of climate change but also with mounting fear and helplessness about their future. In recent years, the term eco-anxiety is recognized as a way of identifying the prolonged emotional distress many people, and especially young people, experience due to their fear over the health of the planet and climate change. As a common, underlying fear of environmental disaster, eco-anxiety develops from repeated exposure to apocalyptic climate coverage, often pointing to doomsday predictions and inducing

helplessness. As climate change more and more becomes a part of daily life, from coastal subsidence to urban air pollution, media coverage is important in shaping the public's perception of the crisis. While the media is important in raising awareness, its constant presentation of bleak environmental scenarios can sometimes amplify the psychological impact, especially when solutions are not provided or good news comes forward. The country has witnessed a range of climate disasters, from disastrous floods to scorching heat waves and shifts in the trend of agriculture. These incidents are widely reported by the national media of the country, which keep reporting on worsening climate conditions. The youth of Pakistan, forming a significant proportion of the country's population, are exposed to these media depictions to a larger degree (Siraj et al., 2019). With the vulnerability of young people to mental illness, especially in a society where emotional well-being is not taken seriously, it becomes necessary to examine how this exposure to climate change reporting is affecting their mental well-being. While more global recognition of the psychological effects of climate change exists, one can notice that there is research lacuna about Pakistan. The psychological impact of climate change news, particularly the emergence of eco-anxiety among Pakistani youth, is not fully explored. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of exposure to news on climate matters influences the psychological well-being of Pakistani youth, relation to anxiety, stress, and behavioral patterns.

Problem Statement

With deteriorating climate change, its psychological effects on vulnerable populations, particularly young people, are felt more and more. In Pakistan, where natural disasters due to climate change are becoming a usual occurrence, from floods and heat waves to droughts, youths are bombarded with a regular stream of news about climate change through various channels. The perennial flood of spine chilling, apocalyptic and anxiety provoking reporting is generating eco-anxiety ongoing mode of emotional stress and worry over the destiny of the planet and the impact of climate change. While the environmental effects of climate change in Pakistan is well documented, its mental health consequences namely, increased anxiety and psychological distress among youth are relatively uncharted. The connection between media consumption of climate change news and the development of eco-anxiety remains poorly researched, particularly with regard to Pakistani youth who are most vulnerable due to Pakistan's socioeconomic challenges as well as increasing climate related incidents. (Bakht et al., 2018)

Framing techniques such as the use of metaphors or emphasizing particular consequences have proven to be powerful tools in shaping public sentiment. When climate change is framed as a health crisis, concern and support for solutions may increase. On the other hand, portraying it as an economic threat may reduce support for necessary transitions (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007). This research tries to fill this gap by exploring how exposure to climate change headlines has an influence on the mental health of Pakistani youth. It aims to investigate the extent to which media exposure leads to the creation of eco-anxiety, establish the emotional and psychological responses that are triggered as a result of exposure, and analyze the coping mechanism that is employed by youth in addressing the stress caused due to climate reports. Through comprehension of these dynamics, the research informs media practice, mental health interventions, and youth engagement programs, offering guidance on how to reduce the psychological burden of climate change coverage and help young people cope with the emotional toll of this global crisis.

Research Questions

- In how far does repetitive exposure to news on climate change contribute towards developing eco-anxiety among Pakistani youth?

- What psychological and emotional responses are triggered in Pakistani youth due to exposure to climate change news?

These research questions attempt to determine the extent of the interaction between media usage and emotional disturbance and how adolescents respond and cope with the resultant anxiety produced by climate related content.

Objectives

- To identify the emotional impact of prolonged exposure to news related to climate change on the mental health of young Pakistanis with specific reference to the development of eco-anxiety.
- To examine coping mechanisms applied by Pakistani youth after the exposure of climate change news, leading to psychological distress and to understand the emotional and behavioral reactions.

Research Gap

Despite growing global concern about the psychological effects of climate change, there remains a huge research gap on how climate change headlines influence the mental health of youth, particularly in the developing world of Pakistan. Whereas the majority of the literature focuses on the environmental and physical effects of climate change, the emotional toll, especially the development of eco-anxiety, remains largely unexplored in the Pakistani context. Furthermore, whereas global research is put under scrutiny for measuring eco-anxiety, it overlooks the influence of media framing, frequency of exposure, and culture on psychological responses in specific groups, such as Pakistani youth. In Pakistan, where climate change is already a matter of serious concern due to recurring natural disasters, extreme weather, and environmental degradation, the lack of research on the psychological effects of exposure to climate related news in the media creates a yawning knowledge gap. The emotional and psychological effects of exposure to climate change news in Pakistan's unique socio-political context, where the youth are especially vulnerable to mental distress, are unexamined systematically. This research aims to bridge this gap and provide critical observations on how Pakistani youth are emotionally affected by climate change reports, how media discourse affects their mental well-being (Siraj et al., 2016) and how they cope with eco-anxiety.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant as it brings attention to an emerging psychological concern eco-anxiety among Pakistani youth, a topic that has been largely overlooked in national discourse. In a country where climate change is no longer a future threat but a lived reality, understanding its emotional and psychological effects is both timely and essential. With the youth comprising a substantial portion of Pakistan's population, their mental health in the context of worsening climate conditions deserves focused scholarly and policy attention. The study contributes to filling a major research gap in the Pakistani context by examining how frequent exposure to climate change news particularly in alarmist or catastrophic tones impacts the mental well-being of young people. While global research has started to highlight the mental toll of climate change, very few studies have specifically explored this connection in developing countries like Pakistan, where media access is high and psychological support systems are limited.

Additionally, this study has practical implications for media professionals, mental health practitioners, educational institutions, and policy-makers. It underscores the importance of balanced, solution-focused climate reporting that raises awareness without inducing fear or hopelessness. At the same time, it highlights the need to integrate mental health support and coping

strategies into youth-focused climate education and public health initiatives. By doing so, the research promotes not only awareness of eco-anxiety but also actionable recommendations to build emotional resilience among youth.

Ultimately, this study aims to shift the narrative from fear to empowerment, encouraging young people to engage with climate issues constructively while protecting their psychological well-being. It lays the foundation for future interdisciplinary research and serves as a guide for implementing holistic, youth-centered climate communication and support systems in Pakistan.

Hypotheses

1. Exposure frequency to climate change news is positively related to the level of eco-anxiety among Pakistani youth. To be more specific, individuals who are frequently exposed to more frequent and alarmist climate change news are likely to report higher levels of eco-anxiety.
2. Framing by the media plays a significant role in deciding psychological distress in youth in Pakistan. Youth exposed to climate change reports that utilize sensational and fearful frames experience greater emotional distress and anxiety than others who watch neutral or solution-frames news.

Literature Review

In the Pakistani context, climate-induced disasters like recent floods and heavy monsoon rains have devastated communities, affecting millions including children and damaging critical infrastructure. According to data from UNICEF (2022) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2022), these events have had profound humanitarian consequences. The World Bank (2022) estimates the financial losses from such climate events to be substantial, underscoring the urgent need for resilience-building and climate adaptation strategies.

News outlets act as intermediaries, translating complex scientific data into accessible narratives for a broader audience (McCombs, 2011; Wilson, 1995). These representations are not neutral they emphasize certain aspects of climate change while minimizing others, thus framing the issue in ways that shape emotional and behavioral responses (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009). How the media frames climate change whether as a public health emergency, economic burden, or global security threat can either spur public action or contribute to apathy and confusion.

Importantly, while media can enhance understanding, it also has the potential to distort or oversimplify scientific facts. This dual role demands a careful balance between raising awareness and ensuring accuracy, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues like climate anxiety.

In response to these mounting global concerns, the United Nations launched the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific targets aimed at creating a more equitable and sustainable future (Nerini et al., 2017). Among these, SDG 13 is dedicated to climate action, emphasizing the urgency of addressing climate change and its wide-ranging effects (United Nations General Assembly, 2017).

Climate action encompasses a comprehensive set of strategies, including mitigation, adaptation, and the enhancement of scientific understanding regarding environmental changes (United Nations, n.d.). These efforts are directed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening resilience to climate-related events, and deepening awareness of the complex factors influencing Earth's climate systems. SDG 13 also calls for implementing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and enhancing national planning and adaptive capacities. Measurable indicators help assess progress toward these goals and ensure accountability.

Mitigation, a central pillar of climate action, focuses on decreasing emissions of greenhouse gases

primarily carbon dioxide and methane that contribute to global warming (SDG 13). Efforts to limit these emissions involve coordinated actions from individuals, businesses, and governments. Importantly, addressing climate change is not only essential for achieving SDG 13, but is also critical for advancing multiple other goals, given the interconnected nature of the SDGs (Smajgl et al., 2015).

Indeed, a comprehensive review by Nerini et al. (2019) confirms that tackling climate change supports all 17 SDGs. For example, climate change intensifies issues such as food and water insecurity (SDGs 2 and 6), heightens health risks (SDG 3), and disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including women and children (SDGs 5 and 4). Conversely, addressing it can promote clean energy solutions (SDG 7) and foster sustainable economic development (SDG 8) (Sachs et al., 2016). Therefore, advancing climate action is fundamental to both SDG 13 and the broader vision of sustainable development.

Research Design

The current study employs a quantitative design in an effort to examine the impact of climate change news headlines on the mental health of Pakistani youth and the construction of eco-anxiety. The study is structured in such a manner that it attempts to investigate the link between media usage, emotional distress, and coping mechanisms among the youth.

1. Methodology: The research employs a survey research method to gather primary data. Surveys present an efficient way of gathering opinions from a large number of respondents, hence attaining a varied sample and allowing statistical examination of data. The research is able to gather the emotional response, anxiety level, and coping mechanism of Pakistani youth on the basis of climate change news exposure.

2. Sampling: A purposive sampling method is used to take a sample of 300 Pakistani youth. The youth are selected because they belong to a population that is highly concerned with climate issues and are more susceptible to mental health issues. The population consists of young adults between the ages of 18 to 30 years, to guarantee that the participants are within an age group that is actively consuming media and also most probably affected by psychological stress in accordance with the issue of climate.

3. Data Collection: The data are gathered through a guided questionnaire with close ended questions. The questionnaires are designed to measure:

- The nature and frequency of contact to climate change news
- Emotional responses to climate change news
- Coping strategies employed by the youth

Demographic data in order to investigate response differences by age, gender, and socioeconomic status is utilized.

4. Ethical Considerations: The study adheres to ethical guidelines in data collection, ensuring participant anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality. Participants are adequately informed about the purpose of the study, and they are permitted to participate on a voluntary basis. The study is responsive to the sensitivity of the topic, providing sources of mental health care if any participant is distressed as a result of the study.

5. Data Analysis: Descriptive and inferential statistics are used to analyze the data collected. Pie charts are used to show the distribution of answers on significant variables such as the severity of eco-anxiety and coping mechanisms. The analysis also tests the effects of different types of media framing on emotional responses.

Research Methodology

This study takes a quantitative research design to study the psychological impact of climate change news on Pakistani youth mental health with a special focus on emerging eco-anxiety. The research design is structured to explore the relationship between media viewing and mental health responses of Pakistani youth in a scientific way.

1. Research Approach

The study uses a survey research design, one of the general quantitative designs for gathering large scale data regarding attitudes, behaviors, and opinions. The method allows the researcher to effectively get data on the emotional and psychological responses of Pakistani youth towards news on climate change and the way they cope.

2. Population and Sample

- **Population:** The selected population for the purpose of this study is Pakistani youth from the ages of 18-30. This is the selected age as they are most engaged with social media, news websites.
- **Sample Size:** 300 youth sampled using a targeted sampling approach sampling, a non-probability sample in which the participants are chosen specifically based on their suitability for research. The sample gender, socio-economic status, and geographical region is representative of Pakistan and spans across different experiences and perspective.

3. Data Collections Tool

- **Survey Questionnaire:** A structured questionnaire is developed to gather data on the following major variables.
- **Exposure to Climate Change News:** Participants asked about how often and where they are exposed to climate change news.
- **Emotional Responses:** Emotional responses to climate change news like fear, worry, helplessness and hopelessness, symptoms of echo anxiety, asked about.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** The survey examines the coping mechanisms young people employ to deal with distress from climate change reports, such as avoidance behaviors, seeking social support, or taking action on climate.
- **Demographics:** Basic demographic information is collected to related responses between different subgroups.

4. Data Collection Process

- **Procedure:** The online survey distributed to the participants through email and social networking sites. Disseminating the survey online ensures that the survey reaches the participants throughout the country, offering accessibility and representation from diverse places in Pakistan. The survey lasts four weeks so that is sufficient time to traverse a representative number of participants.
- **Ethical Concerns:** The participants informed of the purpose of the study and of their right to confidentiality. Informed consent obtained from all participants before they fill in the survey. The emotional welfare of the participants is protected within the study, with assistance available for mental health in the event of distress during course.

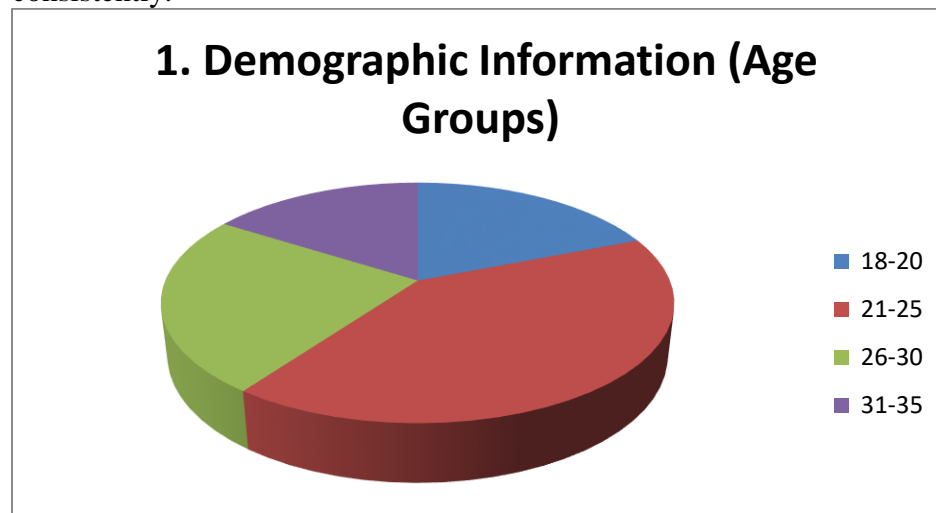
5. Data Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Analysis of the data initiated by employing descriptive statistics for the description of the data in terms of frequency, means, and standard deviation. This would provide a basic overview of media exposure levels, emotional distress levels, and the coping behavior among the participants. Collective results are displayed by using Pie Charts for ease of understanding.
- **Pie Charts:** Pie charts used to show significant findings visually, such as the level distribution of eco-anxiety and the coping mechanisms of the sample group.

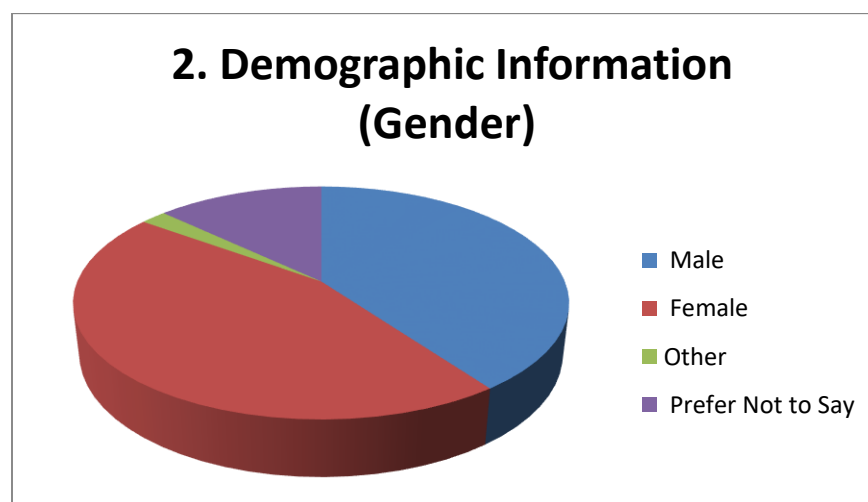
- **Inferential Statistics:** Correlation analysis utilized to test hypotheses with a view to understanding the interrelationship between exposure frequency of climate change news and the level of eco-anxiety. Interrelationship between media framing (catastrophic and solution framing) and emotional distress will also be explored. This serves the purpose of establishing whether exposure to certain media influences psychological response among youth. Collective results are displayed by using Pie Charts for ease of understanding.

6. Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, the pilot test is conducted among a small youth population before the actual survey is given. The pilot test is used to refine the questionnaire and remove any vague wording or ambiguities. Reliability ascertained using Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency, which assures the survey measures variables consistently.

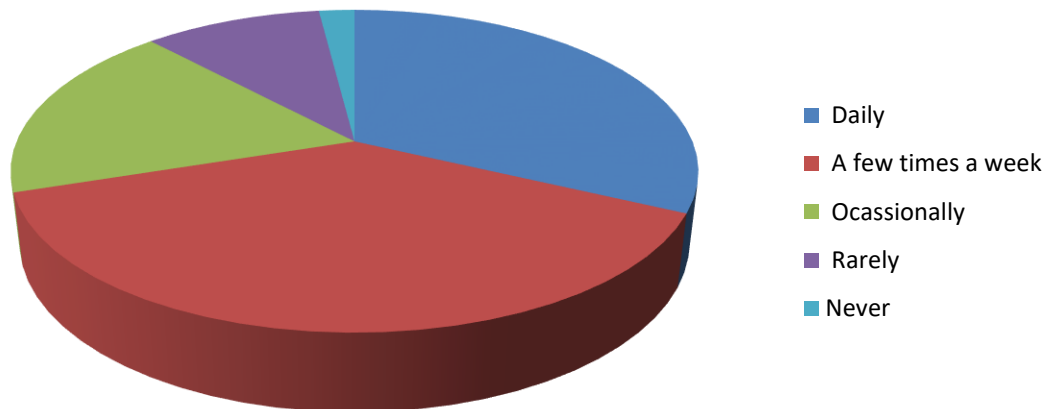


Discussion: Demographic data shows that the data is collected from youth of age groups 18-20, 21-25, 26-30, and 31-35 with the frequency sample response percentage of 19%, 41%, 24%, and 16% in chronological order.



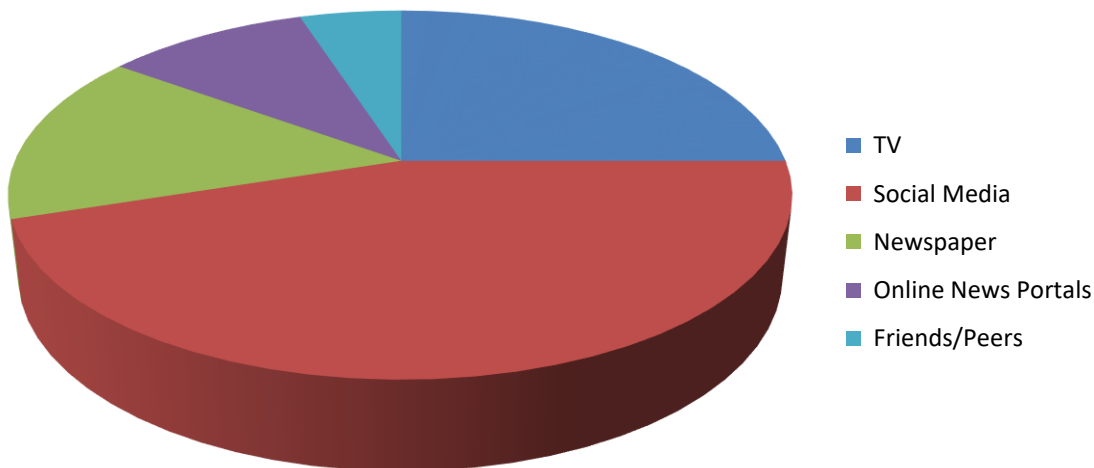
Discussion: The respondents of the study are 40% male, 45% female, 2% other, and 13% respondents preferred not to reveal their gender identity.

3. How often do you come across climate change-related news on any platform (TV, social media, newspapers, etc.)?



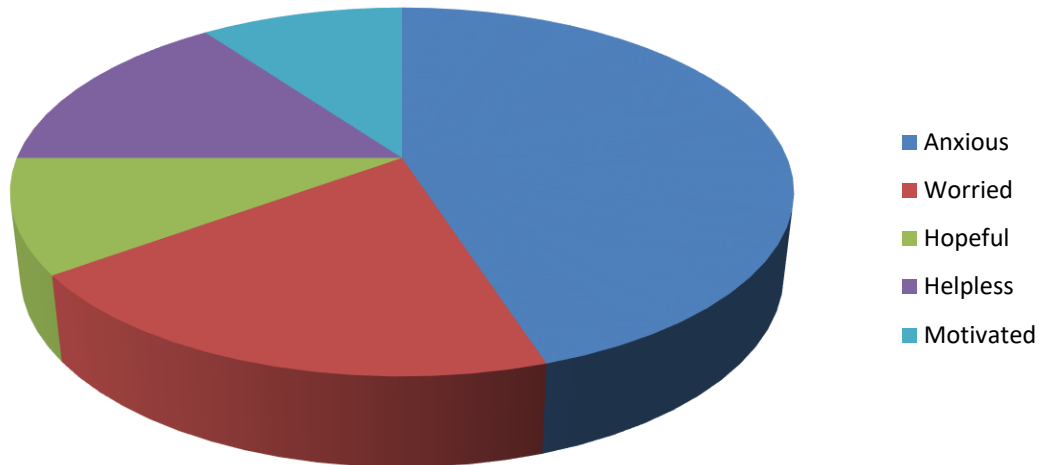
Discussion: The study found that majority of people comes across climate change related news on platforms like TV, Social Media, and Newspaper etc. few times a week, while a lot of people also come across climate news daily, while few responded as occasionally and rarely.

4. Which source do you most frequently use to access climate change news?



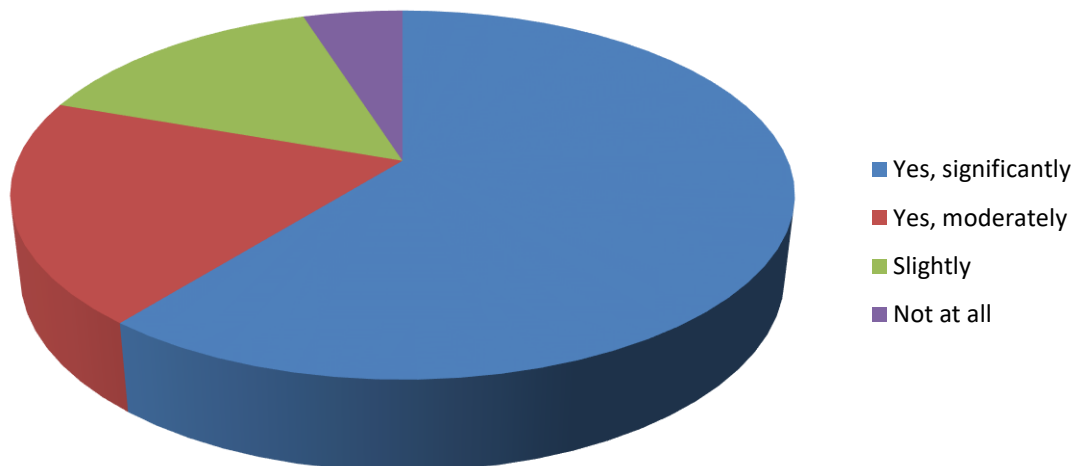
Discussion: Respondents of the study are mostly used to with social media, Youth preferred social media to access climate change related news, a number of people also access climate related news via TV, Newspapers, and via friends or peers. Social media is found to be the most popular platform to access climate related news among youth in Pakistan.

5. How do you typically feel after reading or watching news about climate change?



Discussion: The study found that people get anxious while reading or watching news about climate change, while others get worries and helpless, and some other optimists feels hopeful and motivated.

6. Do you believe that climate change news affects your mental or emotional well-being?

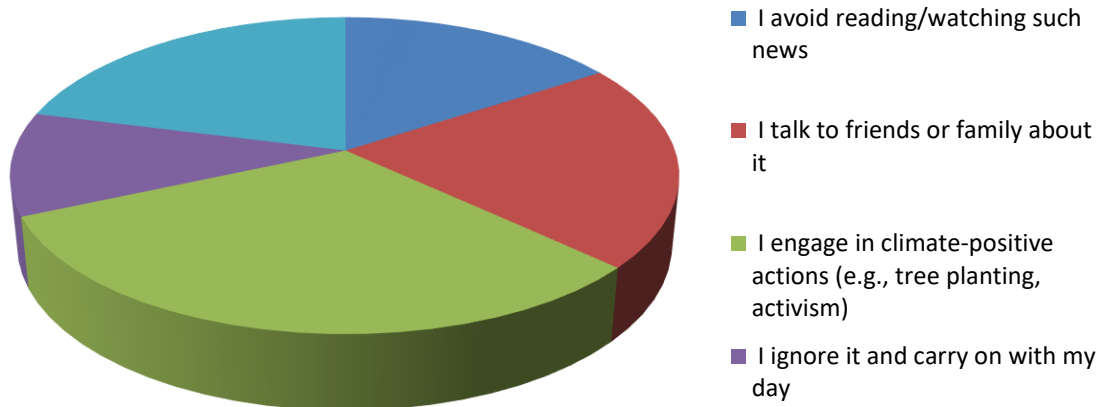


Discussion: People believe that climate change news significantly affects their mental or emotional well-being, while some of the respondents bear moderate affects; similarly some has slightly less than moderated affects while few numbers of respondents reveals that they don't have

any

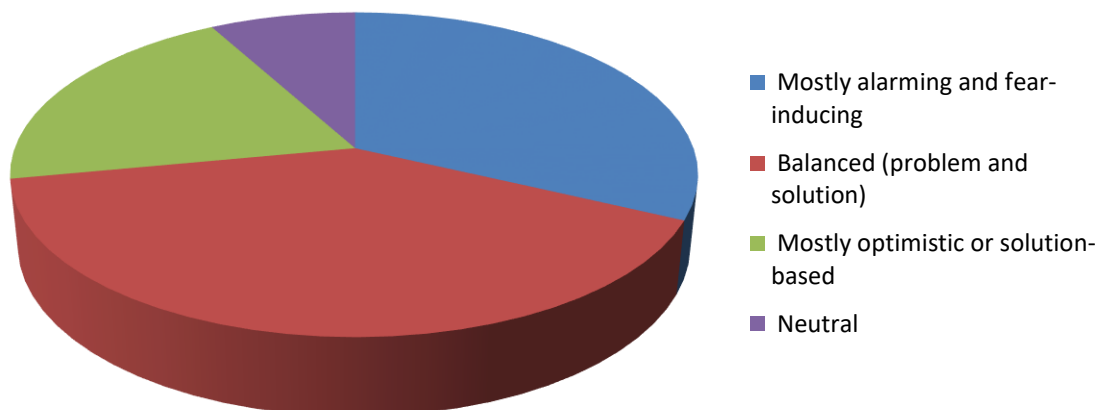
affect.

7. How do you usually cope with the anxiety or distress caused by climate change news?



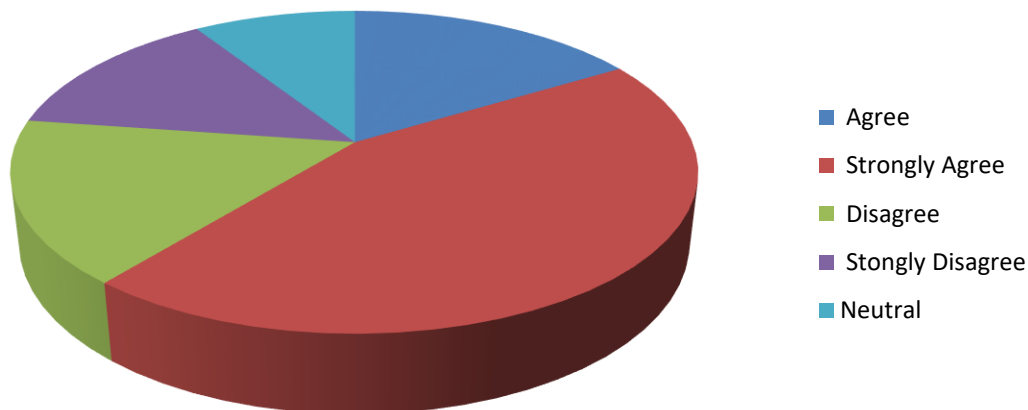
Discussion: The study found that youth usually cope with anxiety or distress caused by climate change news by applying following methods by response ranking wise; they engage in climate positive actions for example tree plantation and activism, they talk to their friends or family about it, they avoid reading/watching such news, and they ignore and carry on with their daily life activities.

8. How would you describe the tone of most climate change news you encounter?



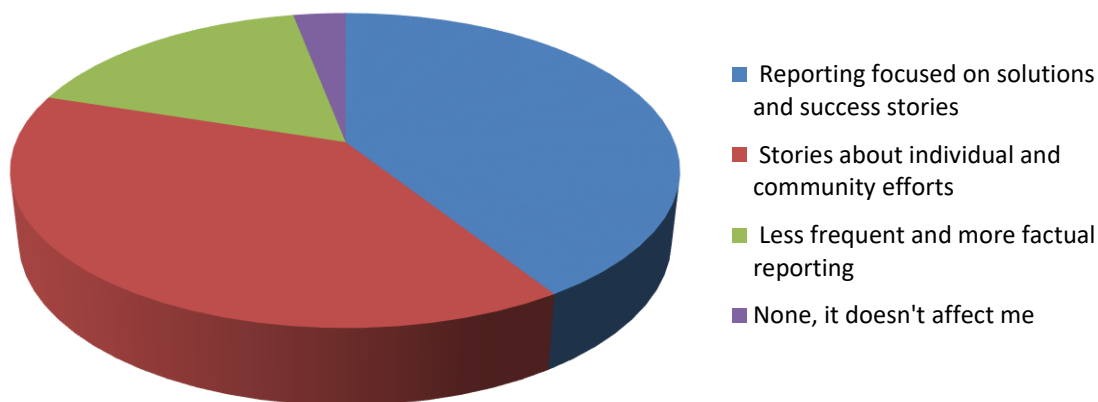
Discussion: The data collected and analyzed from the respondents reveals that the tone of most climate change news they encounter are somewhat balanced while other says it is mostly alarming and fear inducing in contrast some claims that it is mostly optimistic or solution based and few were found to be the neutral in this regard.

9. Do you think news that emphasizes disasters and fear increases your anxiety about the future?



Discussion: Youth claims that the news that emphasizes disasters and fear increases their anxiety level and they get worries about future, utilizing the likert rating scale method for this response the youth is agree and strongly agree on the mentioned statement while some are disagree and very few are strongly disagreed and some were found to be the neutral.

10. In your opinion, what kind of climate change reporting would reduce anxiety and encourage action?



Discussion: Respondents recommendations regarding the question that what kind of climate change reporting would reduce anxiety and encourage action? The youth recommended percentage frequency response wise ranking; To focus on stories about individual and community efforts,

reporting focused on solutions and success stories, less frequent and more factual reporting and few respondents claims that it doesn't affect them.

Findings

1. Eco-Anxiety Prevalence: A high percentage of youth respondents reported experiencing emotional distress, being subjected to climate change reports. These emotional reactions are much stronger for individuals fined out to alarmist and fear evoking reports..

2. Frequency of Media Exposure: Youth who continually receive news related to climate change, in particular, from media like social media and TV, are likely to show higher levels of eco-anxiety. Frequency of exposure is shown to directly relate to increasing emotional distress, further supporting the suggestion of sustained exposure to worsening psychological effects.

3. Media Framing Influence: Media framing has also been found to be the major determinant of participants' psychological well-being. Adolescents getting mostly catastrophic and fear-based framing of climate change experienced greater emotional distress compared to those who had solution-focused or balanced framing of climate change news.

4. Coping Mechanisms: Volunteers identified various coping mechanisms to deal with stress triggered by climate change information. These are not restricted to avoidant strategies such as avoiding exposure to painful information, but even more active responses such as engagement in environmental activism or seeking support from family members and friends to alleviate their worry. These are indicators of an active effort to restore a feeling of control or seeking constructive avenues of expressing their anxiety.

Conclusions

The results of the study highlight the overwhelming psychological effects of climate change media news on young Pakistanis, in the shape of eco-anxiety. The results highlight the significance of frequency and coverage angles on climate change as much as in creating emotional responses. High frequency of overhyped news reporting increases fearfulness, powerlessness, and anxiety among the youth, whereas solution focused reporting is less harmful to mental health. Overblown news reporting with excessive frequency increases fearfulness, helplessness, and anxiety among young people, whereas solution-focused reporting damages mental health to a lesser extent. The study also establishes that while media coverage of climate change is needed in the sense of awareness, it can become a source of psychological harm if it is predominantly focused on apocalyptic outcomes without hope windows or agency. The coping strategies employed by the youths dictate that while some retreat from the issue, others engage in environmental activities in order to address their issues, meaning that there is a need for empowerment in times of environmental disasters.

Recommendations

1. Responsible Media Reporting: Media adopt a balanced coverage strategy for climate change. Reporting on solutions, green success stories, and pragmatic steps, media can ease some of the psychological burden from the youth while keeping climate change in mind. Hope and real action can provide comfort from hopelessness.

2. Mental Health Interventions:

Specific mental health interventions to treat eco-anxiety need to be incorporated in climate education among youth. The services should offer youth strategies to cope with emotional distress induced by climate change and foster resilience in the face of climate stress.

3. Climate Education and Empowerment: Youth groups and schools need to embed psychological resilience in young people by connecting climate learning with effective coping

strategies for eco-anxiety. Equipping young people with the issues and solutions of climate change empowers them with a sense of agency and hope.

4. Generating Positive Participation: Encouraging young people to participate in community-based and environmental action provides them with a vent for their frustration and reduces feelings of hopelessness. Fostering active local climate participation can enable youths to be confident that they are bringing actual change.

5. Future Studies: Future studies need to examine the long-term psychological impact of climate change news on youth and investigate the role of coping strategies. Future studies also need to identify socio-economic, regional, and cultural factors that influence the emotional response of youth to climate change stories.

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