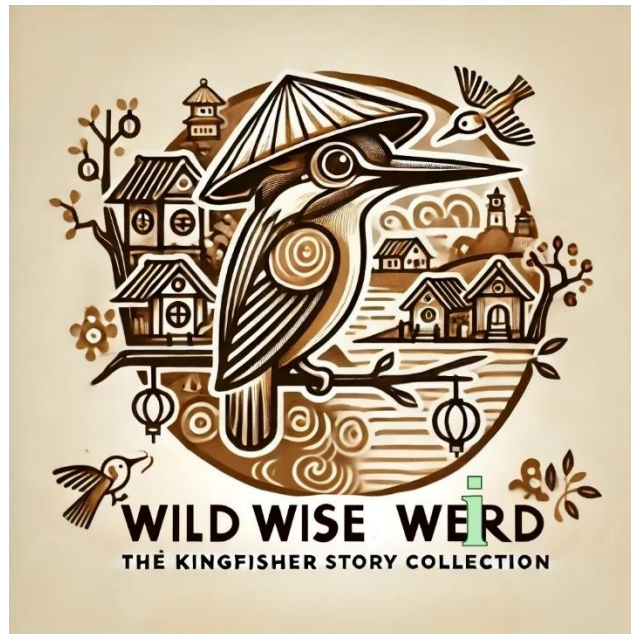


How Young People Think, Feel, and Act on Climate Change

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“Kingfisher takes up the mission and convenes the village for a final decision:

– We shall all join hands to visit Snake at his home. I will speak up on our behalf; if he doesn’t listen, we will battle it out with him right there.”

In “The Virtue of Sacrifice”; *Wild Wise Weird* [1]



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Climate change is widely regarded as the greatest threat to global health. Yet, its consequences are not experienced equally. Young people, in particular, are disproportionately vulnerable to both the physical and mental health impacts of climate change [2,3]. A recent scoping review by Tapia-Echanove et al. [4] provides a comprehensive synthesis of how youth—individuals aged 15 to 24—perceive, emotionally respond to, and act in the face of climate change.

Drawing on 48 studies conducted worldwide, the review reveals that most young people acknowledge the reality of climate change and predominantly attribute it to human activities. While many correctly identify key drivers, such as carbon emissions, persistent misconceptions endure. Some young people continue to conflate climate change with unrelated issues like ozone depletion or interpret it as a natural or even divine occurrence (i.e., “the will of God” as punishment for “sinful” behavior). Young people commonly recognize visible climate impacts, such as rising temperatures and extreme weather events, and consider them to have a direct link to human health and well-being [4].

Youth responses to climate change are shaped not only by knowledge but also by emotion. Many express worry, fear, or distress regarding the climate crisis. Yet, these emotions are not inherently negative. Constructive emotional responses, such as hope and meaning-focused coping—finding purpose and agency despite the challenges—are positively associated with pro-environmental behaviors. Conversely, excessive worry without avenues for meaningful action may lead to heightened distress, anxiety, or depressive symptoms among young people.

When it comes to climate-related behavior, the review highlights that young people who engage in activism or adopt pro-environmental practices often do so through community involvement and peer networks. However, many youth continue to feel disempowered, perceiving that effective climate solutions rest primarily in the hands of governments and industries rather than individuals. This perceived lack of agency, combined with the scarcity of action-oriented and solution-focused messages in media and education, may contribute to the persistent gap between climate concern and actual behavioral change.

In response, the authors call for a fundamental shift in climate change education [4]. Beyond the delivery of scientific knowledge, educational efforts should address the emotional dimensions of climate change, foster collective efficacy, and actively empower young people to become part of the solution. Community-based initiatives and participatory approaches have proven especially effective, not only in promoting pro-environmental behaviors but also in enhancing young people’s psychological well-being.

The relationship between youth and climate change is shaped by more than just knowledge; it is deeply interwoven with emotions, social connections, and opportunities for meaningful action. Understanding this nature-human nexus is vital [5]. By equipping young people with constructive coping strategies, facilitating community engagement, and designing inclusive climate policies,

society can help transform climate-related worry into empowered action—advancing both human well-being and the health of the planet.

References

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