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Research Paper

Climate Anxiety, Pro-Environmental Behaviour, and Climate Emergency Coping Strategies in Residents of Delhi NCR: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has significant psychological implications, particularly among young adults, with eco-anxiety increasingly linked to environmental engagement. The present study examined the relationships between climate anxiety, environmental coping strategies, and pro-environmental behaviours, and assessed the predictive role of climate anxiety and coping strategies. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 202 young adults through self-report measures assessing cognitive and functional impairment related to climate anxiety, coping strategies, and multiple domains of pro-environmental behaviour. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analyses and multivariate regression. Results indicated that cognitive impairment and adaptive coping strategies—particularly individual functional and social functioning coping—were significant predictors of pro-environmental behaviours across domains. Functional impairment and dysfunctional coping demonstrated weaker and domain-specific effects. No significant demographic differences were observed across gender, employment status, or educational qualification. The findings suggest that cognitive engagement with climate change may serve as a constructive motivator for environmental action when supported by adaptive coping strategies. The study highlights the importance of strengthening coping processes to promote both psychological well-being and sustained pro-environmental behaviour.

Keywords: *Climate Anxiety, Pro-Environmental Behaviour, and Climate Emergency Coping Strategies, Delhi NCR*

"We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it."
-Barack Obama, Former US President

Over the past few decades, climate change has been a source of global concern. Significant changes in comprehensive long-term patterns of temperature and precipitation, along with other factors such as local humidity and pressure, are used to characterise climate change. According to Lipczynska-Kochany (2018), Michel et al. (2021), and Murshed and Dao (2020), some of the most well-known domestic and

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worldwide consequences of climate change include erratic weather patterns, the retreat of global ice sheets, and the resulting rise in sea level, questioning sustainability and an increasing vulnerability to deadly diseases and a lower quality of life. According to the report turned in by the United Nations World Health Organisation, it states that 24 per cent of all the estimated global deaths are linked to the environment, with 4.2 million deaths as a result of ambient air pollution and on the other hand, 3.2 million deaths due to inhalation of toxic cooking fuels emitted due to indoor cooking. Climate change is increasingly driving humanitarian crises, including heatwaves, wildfires, floods, tropical storms, and hurricanes, with these events growing in magnitude, frequency, and intensity. Evidence suggests that approximately 3.6 billion people currently reside in regions that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Projections suggest that between 2030 and 2050, climate change could lead to approximately 250,000 additional deaths annually, due to factors such as undernutrition, malaria, diarrhoeal diseases, and heat-related stress. The estimated direct costs of climate-related damage to health—excluding impacts on sectors that influence health, such as agriculture, water supply, and sanitation—are expected to range between USD 2–4 billion per year by 2030. These growing adversities related to environmental degradation have shown a rise in concern amongst the people around the globe, giving birth to the term "Eco-Anxiety or climate anxiety", defined as a rise in anxiousness and distress about the future due to declining climatic conditions, gradually negatively impacting the mental health (Coffey et. al.,2021). An article released by UNICEF in June 2025 explained the impact of cumulative climatic changes on physical and mental health distress, claiming to have a profound impact specifically on children and young adults. Climate change has both direct and indirect impacts on mental health, either long-term or short-term. With rising concerns about climate change, people have been becoming more aware of the changing dynamics of the environment, which has encouraged a smaller section of society to focus on switching to pro- environmental behaviours, described as a type of prosocial behaviour, addressing climate change issues and encouraging behaviours that lead towards sustainable living (Klein et. al., 2022). One can approach pro-environmental behaviour from the perspective of an actor or an observer. Even seemingly comparable actions like recycling glass, paper, and batteries fall into different categories when conduct is characterised from the outside by its ecological implications (i.e., its impact). Even disparate behaviours, like recycling and owning solar panels, seem to fit into a single class of activities when behaviour is internally defined by the actor's intent to protect the environment (Kaiser & Kibbe, 2017). As there has been a rise in climate anxiety and people are turning towards pro-environmental behaviours, there is a corresponding increase in promising approaches towards building resilience and strengthening mental challenges with the help of positive psychology aspects (Nimo et. al., 2025). According to their research, transforming anxiety into proactive behaviours to strategically cope with the distress caused by environmental degradation and increasing their capacity for optimism, self-efficacy and problem solving. Anthropogenic stress and its negative impact on the environmental and social ecosystems have been increasing the risk of mental health disorders like PTSD, stress disorders, anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, mood disorders or even suicidal ideation (Daeninck C., 2023; Charlson et al., 2021). Hence, there has been a requirement for developing stress coping strategies and psychological resilience against the degrading conditions.

Over the years, various policies, agreements and conventions were held. According to the UN Environment Programme report released in 2019, the report on the Vienna Convention, which focused on the modification of the ozone layer, led to changes in UV range emissions reaching Earth's surface, laying the foundation for international cooperation by emphasising

scientific research, monitoring, and shared responsibility in addressing atmospheric degradation, though it did not impose binding controls (UNEP, 1985). Building on this framework, the Montreal Protocol (1987) introduced legally binding measures to phase out ozone-depleting substances and is widely regarded as a successful example of coordinated global environmental action leading to measurable ecological recovery (UNEP, 1987). Subsequently, the Kyoto Protocol (1997) expanded international climate governance by setting binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for industrialised nations and introducing market-based mechanisms to promote accountability and mitigation efforts, while also highlighting global inequities in climate responsibility (UNFCCC, 1998). India has implemented several key environmental policies and legislative frameworks to address environmental degradation and promote sustainable development. Major initiatives include the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, which provides a comprehensive legal framework for environmental protection; the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), 2008, which outlines strategic missions targeting climate mitigation and adaptation; and policies such as the National Environment Policy (2006) and Swachh Bharat Mission, which emphasize environmental conservation, public participation, and behavioural change. More recently, initiatives focusing on renewable energy, air quality management (e.g., National Clean Air Programme), and sustainable urban development reflect India's commitment to addressing climate change and environmental health challenges.

Rationale and Objectives of the Study

Despite these policy efforts, increasing exposure to environmental stressors such as air pollution, extreme heat, and climate-related uncertainties has led to growing psychological concerns, particularly eco-anxiety, among urban populations. Eco-anxiety reflects heightened emotional distress arising from perceived environmental threats and uncertainty about the future, which may influence individuals' motivation, behaviour, and well-being. Understanding how eco-anxiety relates to pro-environmental behaviour and the coping strategies individuals employ is, therefore, crucial. Pro-environmental behaviour can serve as an adaptive, problem-focused coping response that enhances perceived control and agency, while maladaptive coping may intensify distress and disengagement. The present study is thus warranted to examine how environmental concern translates into action or distress, and to identify coping strategies that promote psychological resilience and sustained environmental engagement. Such insights can inform mental health interventions, public awareness programs, and policy communication strategies that not only encourage sustainable behaviour but also address the psychological impact of climate change.

The following objectives have been framed for the above study.

1. To assess the levels of Eco-anxiety, Pro-Environmental Behaviour, and Coping Strategies in the residents of Delhi NCR
2. To examine the relationship between Eco-anxiety, Pro-Environmental Behaviour, and Coping Strategies
3. To determine whether eco-anxiety and environmental coping strategies significantly predict pro-environmental behaviours

According to the above-determined objectives, the following hypotheses were framed to study the variables and to find an interpretation through statistical analysis:

Hypothesis for Objective 2: To examine the relationship between Eco-anxiety, Pro-Environmental Behaviour, and Coping Strategies.

- H1: There will be a significant relationship among eco-anxiety, environmental coping strategies, and pro-environmental behaviour.
- H0: There will be no significant relationship among eco-anxiety, environmental coping strategies, and pro-environmental behaviour.

Hypothesis for Objective 3: To determine whether eco-anxiety and environmental coping strategies significantly predict pro-environmental behaviours

- H3: Eco-anxiety and environmental coping strategies will significantly predict pro-environmental behaviour.
- H03: Eco-anxiety and environmental coping strategies will not significantly predict pro-environmental behaviour.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the relationship between eco-anxiety, pro-environmental behaviour, and coping strategies among residents of Delhi NCR. Data were collected using standardised questionnaires: the Climate Anxiety Scale (Larionow et al., 2022), Pro-Environmental Behaviour Scale (Larson et al., 2015), and Climate Emergency Coping Scale (Silveira et al., 2025). The study was conducted among 200 residents of Delhi NCR who met the inclusion criteria. Statistical analyses were performed using JAMOVI software in accordance with the research objectives. The inclusion criterion includes residents of Delhi NCR and above the age of 18 years, able to provide consent and have sufficient English proficiency for reading and comprehension. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained before participation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Tools Used

Three standardised instruments were used in the study includes scales like Climate Anxiety Scale (CAS) – Developed by Larionow et al. (2022), this 13-item scale measures climate-related anxiety using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Never to 4 = Almost Always). It assesses two dimensions: cognitive impairment (intrusive thoughts and concentration difficulties) and functional impairment (impact on daily functioning). Higher scores indicate greater climate anxiety. The scale demonstrates good reliability ($\alpha \approx .80$) and strong construct and convergent validity.

Pro-Environmental Behaviour Scale (PEBS) – Developed by Larson et al. (2015), this 13-item self-report scale measures environmentally responsible behaviours. It consists of four domains: conservation behaviours, environmental citizenship, land stewardship, and social environmentalism. Items assess the frequency of everyday behaviours that contribute to environmental sustainability. Factor analyses support its multidimensional structure and construct validity.

Climate Emergency Coping Scale (CECS) – Developed by Silveira et al. (2025), this 12-item scale assesses coping responses to climate-related stress. It includes three subscales: functional-individual coping, functional-social coping, and dysfunctional coping. Items are

rated on a Likert scale indicating frequency of coping behaviour. The scale demonstrates adequate reliability ($\alpha > .70$) and strong construct validity.

Scoring and Analysis

Responses were scored according to the guidelines provided in the respective test manuals. Data analysis was conducted using JAMOVI statistical software, and appropriate statistical techniques were applied to examine relationships between eco-anxiety, coping strategies, and pro-environmental behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Environmental anxiety has emerged as a salient psychological response to the growing awareness of climate change and environmental degradation. The present study aimed to examine the relationship between climate anxiety, pro-environmental behaviour, and environmental coping strategies among residents of Delhi NCR. With the increasing concern for the damaging effects of climate anxiety and the impact of climate emergency coping strategies on the pro environmental behaviours. Descriptive statistics for skewness and kurtosis were examined to further evaluate the distributional properties of the variables (Table Y). All variables demonstrated skewness and kurtosis values within acceptable limits. Skewness values ranged from −0.600 (Conservation Lifestyle) to 0.750 (Functional Impairment), while kurtosis values ranged from −0.849 (Land Stewardness) to 0.355 (Individual Functional Coping). When standardised by their respective standard errors, all skewness and kurtosis values fell within ±2, indicating no severe violations of normality. These results suggest that, despite the significant Shapiro–Wilk tests, the distributions of the variables were approximately normal based on skewness and kurtosis criteria, hence parametric testing is used.

Table 1 represents the Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)
Cognitive Impairment	17.93 (7.36)	18.30 (7.19)
Functional Impairment	10.68 (5.22)	11.55 (4.87)
Social Environmentalism	8.04 (2.78)	8.52 (2.98)
Environmental Citizenship	9.24 (3.73)	10.05 (4.10)
Land Stewardship	6.91 (2.98)	7.64 (3.44)
Conservation Lifestyle	11.03 (2.75)	10.88 (2.98)
Individual Functional Coping	17.10 (4.05)	17.93 (3.83)
Social Functional Coping	10.53 (4.10)	11.43 (4.17)
Dysfunctional Coping	7.83 (2.65)	8.89 (3.16)

Descriptive statistics for the study variables were calculated separately for females (n = 105) and males (n = 97). Overall, males reported slightly higher mean scores than females across most variables. Males showed higher levels of cognitive impairment, functional impairment, social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, land stewardship, and coping strategies. In contrast, conservation lifestyle behaviours were similar across genders, with females reporting a marginally higher mean than males. These results indicate small gender differences in eco-anxiety, pro-environmental behaviours, and coping strategies, with males generally reporting slightly greater engagement across most domains.

Table 2 represents the correlation matrix between the subdimensions of Environmental Anxiety, Pro-Environmental Behaviour and Environmental Emergency Coping.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Cognitive Impairment	—								
Functional Impairment	.86***	—							
Social Environmentalism	.42***	.42***	—						
Environmental Citizenship	.48***	.47***	.75***	—					
Land Stewardship	.47***	.47***	.70***	.69***	—				
Conservation Lifestyle	.23***	.20**	.47***	.36***	.37***	—			
Individual Functional Coping	.29***	.24***	.48***	.39***	.38***	.56***	—		
Social Functional Coping	.54***	.52***	.61***	.68***	.58***	.27***	.52***	—	
Dysfunctional Coping	.31***	.29***	.24***	.43***	.32***	.09	.32***	.52***	—

*** 1. Cognitive Impairment, 2. Functional Impairment, 3. Social Environmentalism, 4. Environmental Citizenship, 5. Land Stewardship, 6. Conservation Lifestyle, 7. Individual Functional Coping, 8. Social Functional Coping, 9. Dysfunctional Coping*

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation matrix examining relationships among climate anxiety variables, pro-environmental behaviours, and coping strategies. A strong positive correlation was observed between cognitive impairment and functional impairment ($r = .856$, $p < .001$). Both variables were significantly and positively associated with all pro-environmental behaviour dimensions, though correlations with conservation lifestyle were relatively smaller. The pro-environmental behaviour variables were also strongly interrelated, particularly social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, and land stewardship. Regarding coping strategies, individual functional coping and social functioning coping showed significant positive correlations with climate anxiety variables and all pro-environmental behaviours, indicating that adaptive coping is associated with greater environmental engagement. Dysfunctional coping also showed positive correlations with most variables but was not significantly related to conservation lifestyle. Overall, the results suggest that higher climate anxiety and adaptive coping strategies are associated with stronger pro-environmental behavioural engagement. The strong positive correlation between cognitive and functional impairment indicates that environmental concern–related cognitive burden is closely tied to perceived disruptions in daily functioning. This finding aligns with conceptualizations of eco-anxiety as a multidimensional experience in which intrusive thoughts, rumination, and emotional preoccupation can translate into functional strain (Clayton et al., 2017; Pihkala, 2020). The strength of this association suggests that these constructs, while analytically distinct, may reflect overlapping aspects of environmental distress, raising questions about construct differentiation that future studies should address through longitudinal or latent-variable approaches. Moderate positive

correlations between impairment variables and multiple dimensions of PEB suggest that higher levels of environmental distress may coexist with increased environmental engagement. This finding supports emerging evidence that eco-anxiety can function as a motivational rather than purely debilitating emotion, particularly when individuals perceive environmental threats as personally relevant (Ojala, 2012; Verplanken et al., 2020). However, this relationship should be interpreted cautiously. High correlations do not imply that distress directly causes action; instead, they may reflect a third variable such as environmental identity or moral obligation, which has been shown to drive both concern and behaviour (Clayton, 2003; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010).

Table 3 shows multivariate test results for multiple regression across the key variables

Predictor	Pillai's Trace	F	df1	df2	p
Cognitive Impairment	0.36	27.42	4	193	< .001
Functional Impairment	0.04	2.00	4	193	.096
Individual Functional Coping	0.33	23.93	4	193	< .001
Social Functional Coping	0.29	20.12	4	193	< .001
Dysfunctional Coping	0.09	4.72	4	193	.001

Table 3 presents the results of the multivariate regression analysis examining the effects of climate anxiety and environmental coping strategies on pro-environmental behaviours. The findings indicated a significant multivariate effect of cognitive impairment on pro-environmental behaviours, suggesting that higher cognitive engagement with climate change significantly predicted environmental actions. In contrast, functional impairment did not show a significant multivariate effect. Among coping strategies, both individual functional coping and social functioning coping demonstrated significant effects, indicating that adaptive coping strategies were strong predictors of pro-environmental behaviours. Dysfunctional coping also showed a significant but comparatively smaller effect. Overall, the results suggest that cognitive aspects of climate anxiety and adaptive coping strategies play an important role in predicting pro-environmental behavioural engagement. Various factors that were taken into consideration after the analysis is the role of cognitive impairment, heightened cognitive engagement with climate change aligns with the concept of constructive eco-anxiety, which proposes that climate-related concern can function as an adaptive emotional response when it facilitates awareness, responsibility, and behavioural engagement rather than paralysis. Previous research has shown that individuals who report higher cognitive concern about climate change are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours, including conservation practices, activism, and sustainable lifestyle choices (Susan Clayton, 2020; Panu Pihkala, 2020). In contrast, functional impairment did not significantly predict pro-environmental behaviours. This indicates that when climate anxiety manifests as disruptions in daily functioning, such as difficulty concentrating, avoidance, emotional exhaustion, or reduced productivity, its motivational potential diminishes. This distinction highlights the importance of differentiating between cognitive concern and functional debilitation. The predictive role of environmental coping strategies on such as problem-solving, planning, and behavioural adjustments—appear to provide individuals with concrete pathways for action, thereby increasing environmental engagement. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that problem-focused coping is positively associated with pro-environmental behaviour and psychological well-being in the context of climate stress (Ojala, 2012). Dysfunctional coping also demonstrated a statistically significant, though weaker, association with pro-environmental behaviours.

This suggests a complex and ambivalent relationship, wherein individuals experiencing higher distress may simultaneously engage in both maladaptive coping (e.g., rumination, emotional overload) and environmental action. However, the smaller effect size observed in the present study indicates that dysfunctional coping is less effective in promoting sustained or constructive environmental behaviour compared to adaptive coping strategies. Cognitive impairment and all coping strategies significantly predicted pro-environmental behaviours, whereas functional impairment did not. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported for cognitive aspects of eco-anxiety and coping strategies, but not for functional impairment.

Table 4 represents univariate tests for multiple regression

Predictor	Social Environmentalism	Environmental Citizenship	Land Stewardship	Conservation Lifestyle
Cognitive Impairment	62.39***	88.46***	70.26***	15.93***
Functional Impairment	4.13*	4.13*	6.10*	0.00
Individual Functional Coping	49.08***	26.07***	20.65***	76.96***
Social Functional Coping	31.89***	64.15***	25.81***	1.57
Dysfunctional Coping	4.20*	2.58	0.07	2.54

*Note. Values represent F statistics. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

Table 4 presents the univariate results of the multivariate regression analysis examining the effects of climate anxiety and environmental coping strategies on pro-environmental behaviours. Cognitive impairment significantly predicted all pro-environmental behaviour domains ($p < .001$). Functional impairment showed significant effects on social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, and land stewardship, but not on conservation lifestyle. Individual functional coping significantly predicted all pro-environmental behaviours, while social functioning coping significantly predicted social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, and land stewardship but not conservation lifestyle. Dysfunctional coping showed a significant effect only on social environmentalism. Overall, the results indicate that cognitive climate anxiety and adaptive coping strategies are stronger predictors of pro-environmental behaviours than functional impairment and dysfunctional coping. Cognitive impairment emerged as a significant predictor across all pro-environmental behaviour domains, including social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, land stewardness, and conservation lifestyle. This pattern suggests that cognitive aspects of climate anxiety, such as persistent worry, heightened awareness, and intrusive climate-related thoughts, may function as a motivational driver across both collective and individual environmental actions. These findings are consistent with the notion of constructive eco-anxiety, which posits that cognitive concern about climate change can promote engagement when it heightens moral responsibility and perceived urgency (Susan Clayton, 2020). Functional impairment showed significant predictive effects for social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, and land stewardness, but not for conservation lifestyle. This pattern indicates that when climate anxiety disrupts functioning, it may still motivate externally oriented or socially visible forms of environmental engagement, while failing to support sustained, effortful lifestyle changes. One possible explanation is that

conservation lifestyle behaviours (e.g., reducing consumption, maintaining sustainable habits) require consistent self-regulation and daily functioning, which may be undermined when anxiety interferes with concentration, energy, or productivity (Lazarus & Folkman,1984). Individual functional coping significantly predicted all pro-environmental behaviour domains, indicating that problem-focused strategies such as planning and proactive engagement help translate climate concern into environmental action. Social functioning coping significantly predicted socially oriented behaviours like social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, and land stewardship, but not conservation lifestyle, suggesting that social coping is more relevant for collective environmental engagement than private lifestyle changes. These findings support the role of adaptive coping and collective efficacy in promoting environmental behaviour (Ojala, 2012; Bandura, 2000). Lastly, dysfunctional coping showed a significant effect only for social environmentalism, and did not significantly predict environmental citizenship, land stewardness, or conservation lifestyle. This suggests that maladaptive coping strategies, such as rumination or emotional overwhelm, may occasionally coexist with expressive or symbolic environmental actions, but do not support sustained or structured behavioural engagement. This finding aligns with earlier research indicating that maladaptive coping is associated with emotional reactivity rather than effective problem-solving, often leading to inconsistent or short-lived engagement (Clayton, 2020).

Limitations and Future Implications

The present study provides valuable insights into the relationships between climate anxiety, coping strategies, and pro-environmental behaviour; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables. The reliance on self-report measures may also introduce response bias and may not fully capture the complexity of psychological processes such as eco-anxiety and coping. Additionally, some variables exhibited skewed distributions, necessitating adjustments that may have reduced response variability. The use of a relatively homogeneous sample from a specific population further limits the generalizability of the findings to broader groups. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to better elucidate causal pathways and changes over time. Studies using more diverse and representative samples, along with mixed-method or qualitative approaches, may provide deeper insight into individuals' experiences of climate anxiety and coping. Furthermore, the use of more comprehensive coping measures could help distinguish between adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Such research can contribute to the development of interventions that promote psychological resilience and encourage constructive pro-environmental actions in response to climate change.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between climate anxiety, environmental coping strategies, and pro-environmental behaviours to better understand how emotional responses to climate change influence behavioural engagement. The findings indicate that climate anxiety is multidimensional, with cognitive aspects—such as heightened awareness and concern about climate change—significantly predicting various forms of pro-environmental behaviour, including social environmentalism, environmental citizenship, land stewardship, and conservation lifestyle. This suggests that cognitive engagement with climate change can act as a motivational force that encourages individuals to adopt environmentally responsible actions. In contrast, functional impairment showed weaker associations with behaviour, indicating that when climate-related distress interferes with daily functioning, it may reduce

individuals' ability to engage in sustained environmental actions. The study also highlighted the important role of coping strategies, with adaptive approaches—particularly individual functional coping and social functional coping—emerging as strong predictors of pro-environmental behaviour. These results suggest that the way individuals cope with climate-related concerns may influence behavioural outcomes more strongly than the level of anxiety itself. Dysfunctional coping showed limited influence, reflecting the complex and mixed emotional responses individuals may experience in relation to climate change. Additionally, demographic analyses revealed no significant differences across gender, employment status, or educational qualification, suggesting that climate anxiety and environmental engagement may be widely shared experiences among young adults. Overall, the findings partially supported the study hypotheses and contributed to the growing perspective that climate anxiety should not be viewed solely as a negative psychological outcome but as a potentially constructive emotional response when supported by adaptive coping strategies. The study highlights the importance of promoting psychological resilience, effective coping mechanisms, and collective engagement in climate-related interventions, suggesting that empowering individuals to manage climate-related concerns constructively may support both mental well-being and sustained pro-environmental action in the face of escalating environmental challenges.

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