

Psychology's Role in Dealing with the Climate Emergency

Executive Summary

This briefing paper highlights the key themes and insights from the Psychological Society of Ireland's Special Interest Group in Addressing Climate and Environmental Emergency (SIG ACEE) event held on September 2023 - *A New Climate for Psychology*. The all-day public event brought together experts and practitioners from academia, media and research, who expressed trust in the science of the climate emergency and are deeply concerned about its urgent nature.

Facilitated by Duncan Stewart, the presentations emphasised the urgency of the emergency, psychology's crucial role in the issue, its psychological impact, and the need for a collective response. The event also explored human behaviour and reactions to climate issues with the aim of promoting pro-environmental behaviour change, stimulating reflection, and encouraging conversation about addressing the climate emergency.

Psychology's Role in Addressing the Climate Emergency

i. Recognizing the Urgency of the Climate Emergency

- The climate emergency has led to and will continue to enable mass biodiversity loss, extreme heat, large-scale natural disasters, and unliveable conditions, leading to widespread displacement.
- Mass fatality events, unprecedented since World Wars, are looming on the horizon.

ii. Psychological Impacts and Responses

- Climate anxiety is widespread but often overlooked, affecting individuals and communities, and predominately impacting children and young adults.
- Eco anxiety is spurred by realisation of lack of action to prevent the climate emergency.
- "Psychological thinking is a wonderful weapon in the fight against climate change."
- Climate anxiety is an emotionally natural response not to be cured.

iii. **Psychologically-Informed Climate Activism**

- Psychology-driven activism can be a powerful force for change.
- NGOs and nonprofits, armed with psychological research, can amplify their impact by working together, rallying public support and influencing policymakers.
- Support the growth of climate activist movements that drive change.

iv. **Climate Communication Strategies**

- The absence of climate-focused conversations, known as “climate silence”, hampers climate action.
- Psychology-based strategies can counteract misinformation and promote a climate-conscious culture.
- Creating a pro-climate social feedback loop through communication is vital.
- “The more conversations we can generate, the faster climate action can happen.”

Conclusion

The climate emergency is a multi-faceted challenge that demands comprehensive behavioural and policy responses. This briefing paper signposts the significant role psychology can play to address the climate emergency. Incorporating psychological insights into climate change policy, activism, and communication strategies can pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient future.

Recommendations

Mental Health Support for Climate Anxiety

1. Recognize climate anxiety as a legitimate emotional response and allocate resources for mental health support.
2. Implement psychological interventions tailored to the climate emergency to build resilience and coping skills.
3. Develop mental health resources and support systems for individuals dealing with ecoanxiety.

Speakers

John Gibbons, “Climate and the Everything Emergency.”

Dr Caroline Hickman, “Facing the Difficult Truths of the Climate Emergency; Apocalyptic Disaster or Transformational Moment in History?”

Sadhbh O’Neill – “Movement-building and Activism in Ireland.”

Dr Aaron Thiery – “Ending Climate Silence: Psychological Insights for Climate Change.”

Dr Clare Kelly – “The Stories We Tell: The Stories We’re Told.”

Lisa Fingelton – “The Barna Way.”

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