

Art and Agency: Creativity and eco-anxiety at a time of climate and ecological emergency

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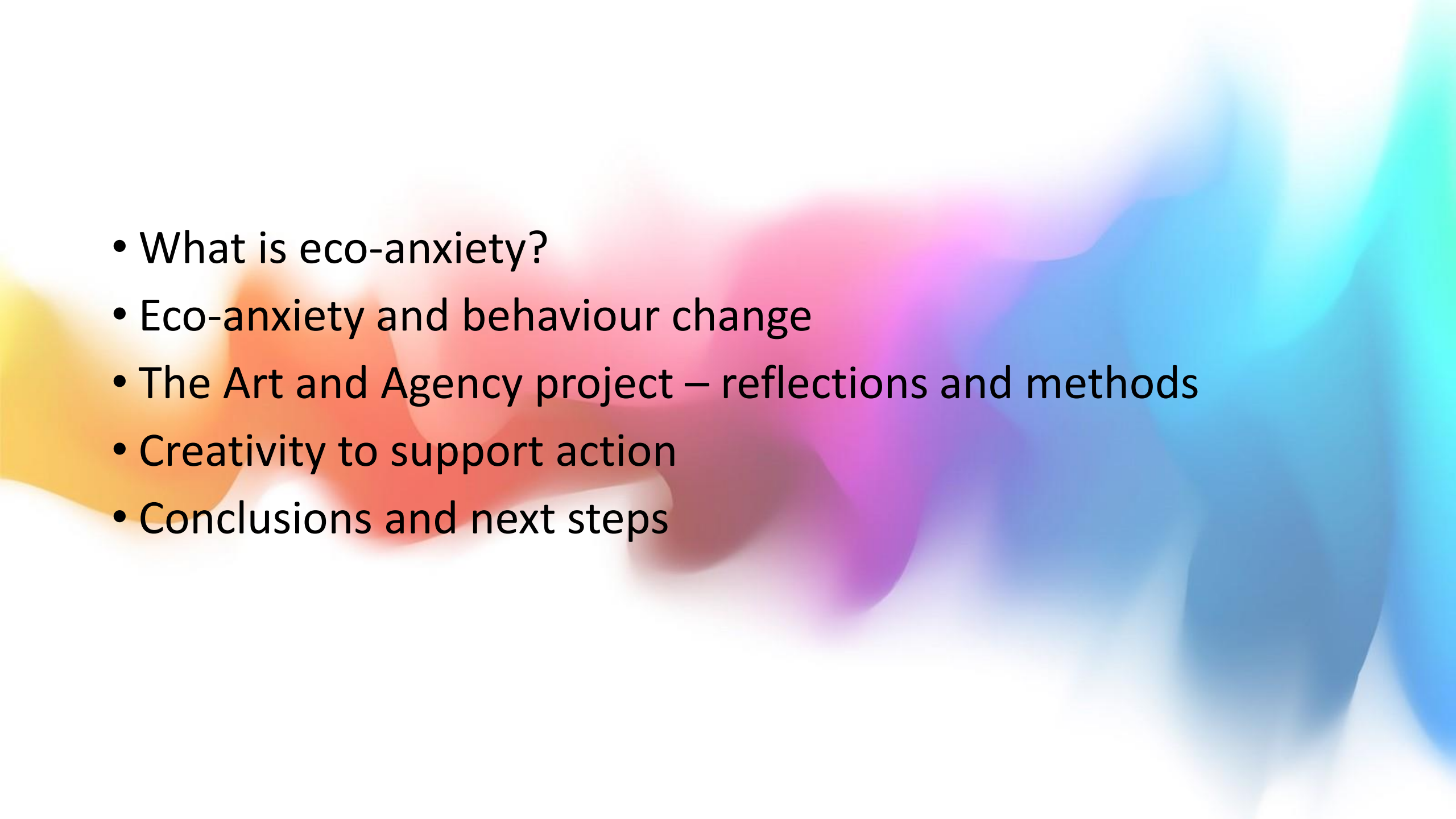
ART and ENERGY



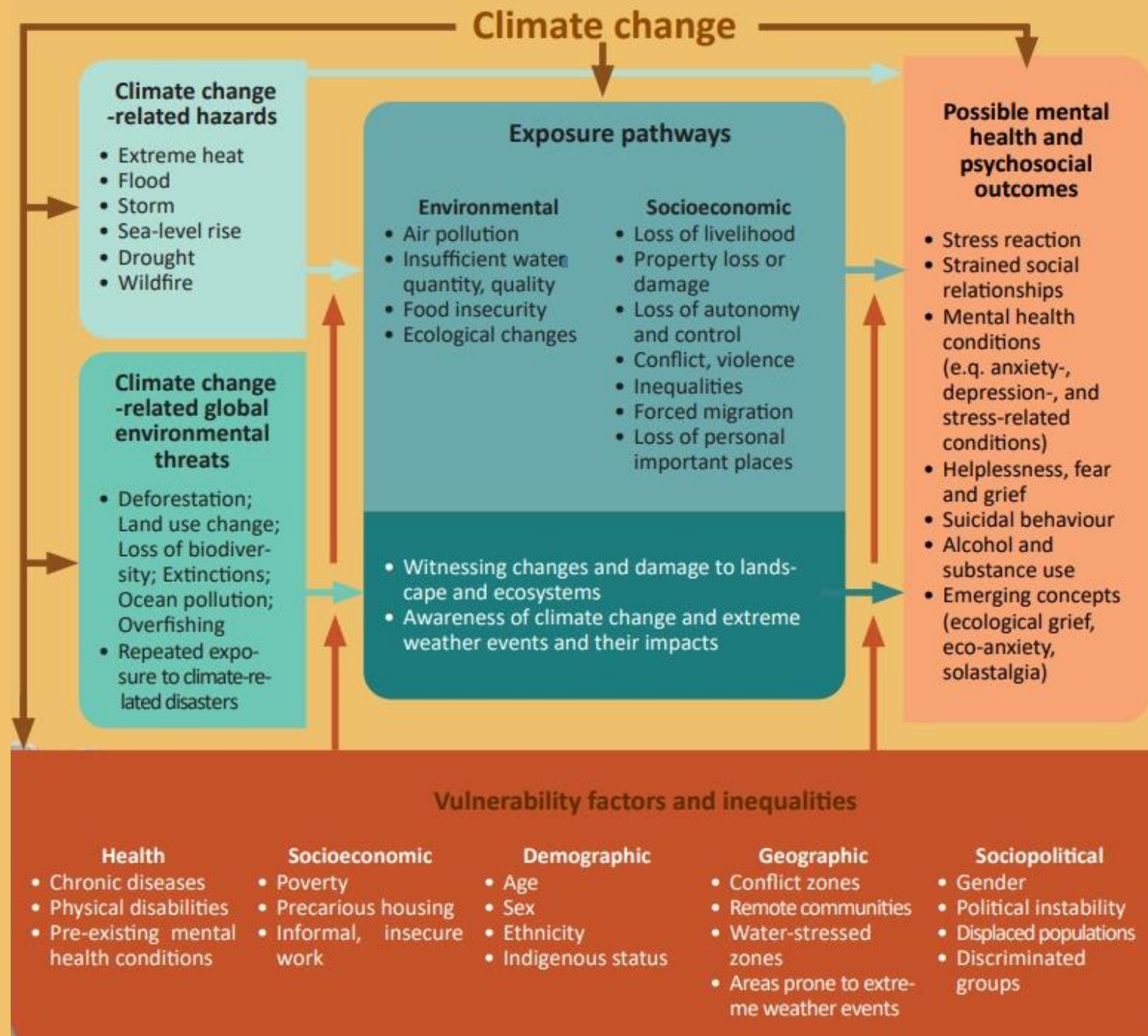
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- What is eco-anxiety?
 - Eco-anxiety and behaviour change
 - The Art and Agency project – reflections and methods
 - Creativity to support action
 - Conclusions and next steps





As scientific evidence of the severity of climate change increases, there are indications that this represents a **significant psychological burden** in the form of climate anxiety on the public (Whitmarsh et al, 2022).

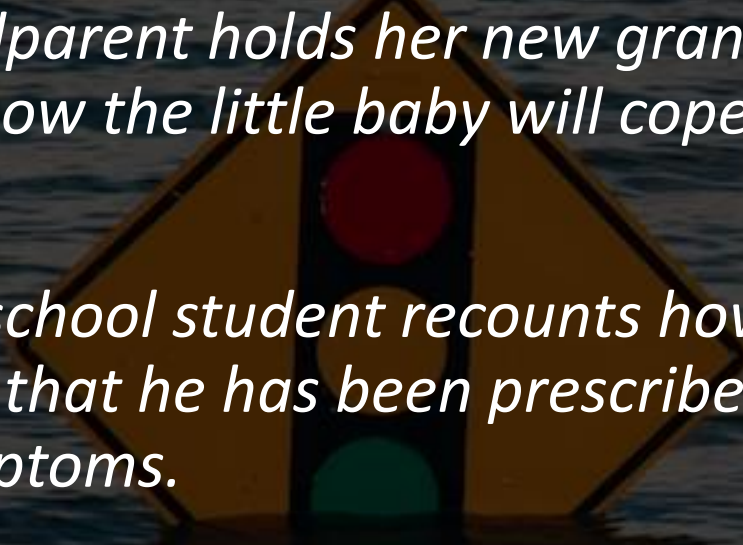
A 2021 WHO survey of 95 countries found that only 9 have thus far included mental health and psychosocial support in their national health and climate change plans.

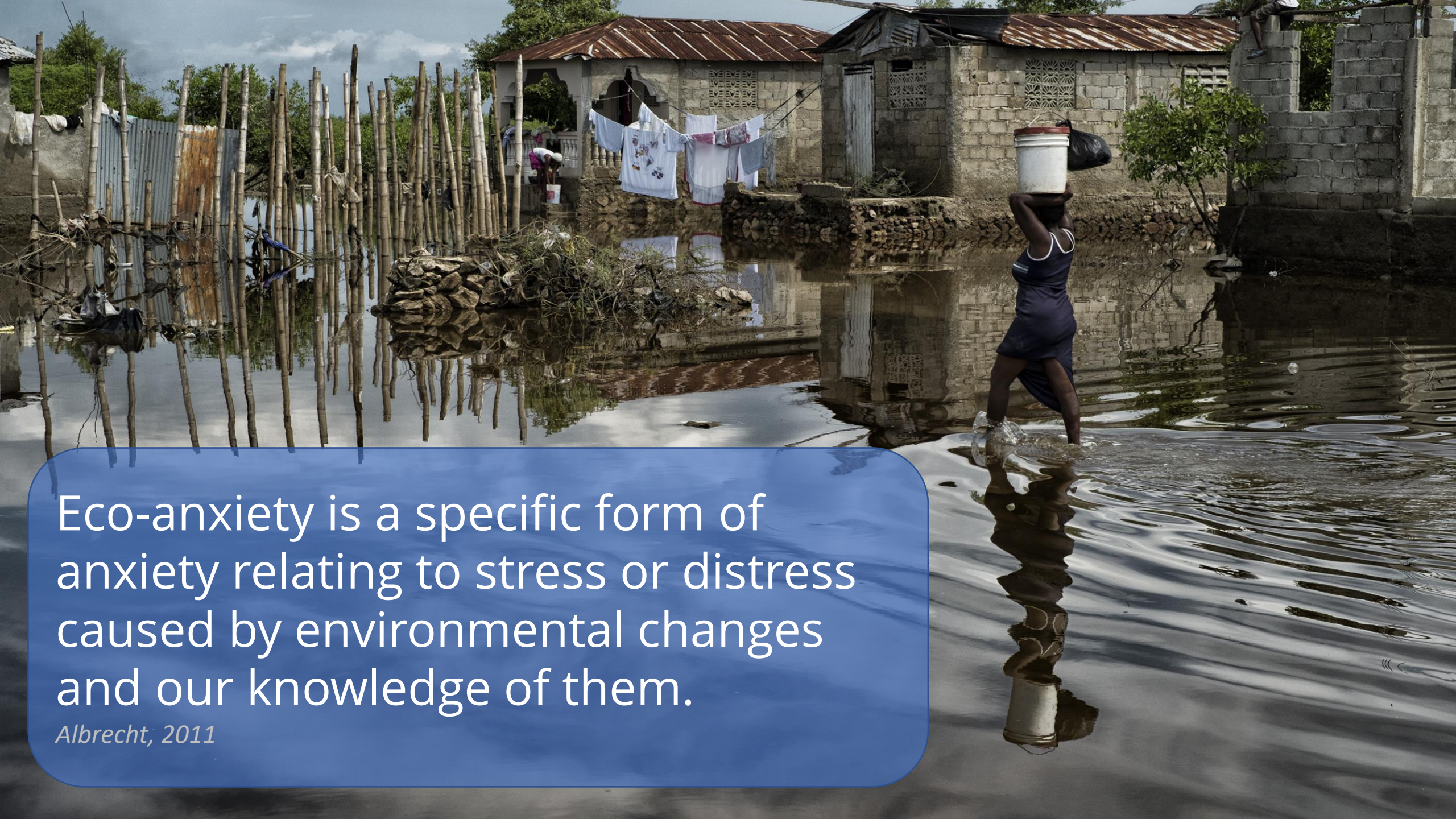
<https://www.who.int/news/item/03-06-2022-why-mental-health-is-a-priority-for-action-on-climate-change>

Kompas/Hendra A Setyawan / World Meteorological Organization



What is eco- and climate-anxiety?

- 
- *A grandparent holds her new grandchild in her arms and feels anxious about how the little baby will cope in a future world.*
 - *A high school student recounts how he is so deeply anxious about climate change that he has been prescribed antidepressants to help him cope with his symptoms.*
 - *A middle-aged person, who usually spends much of her time outdoors, notices that she is going out into nature less often, because being there reminds her of all the losses and all of the threats to the environment.*



Eco-anxiety is a specific form of anxiety relating to stress or distress caused by environmental changes and our knowledge of them.

Albrecht, 2011

Eco-anxiety as Western-centric

Majority of the research comes from Western countries, and future research is needed in non-Western countries.

“Climate anxiety may become more prevalent among indigenous groups due to living in geographically vulnerable areas and the interdependence on the natural environment and cultural practices.”

(p.4, Coffey et al.)





What is eco-anxiety? How it's evolved.

2000– feelings of uncertainty regarding which product to buy based on ‘which was greener’ – with **concrete actions for relief.**

2023 – more severe forms of distress related to environmental disaster with **no obvious mechanisms for alleviation.**



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Some Predicting factors

- Direct experiences of climate and ecological disasters (Reser and Bradley, 2020).
- Indirect experience of climate change through the media (O'Neill, 2020; Whitmarsh et al, 2022).
- Those experiencing generalised anxiety may have a greater disposition to climate and eco-anxiety (Clayton and Karazsia, 2020).
- Nature connectedness? (e.g. Galway et al, 2020).

Predicting factors

- Feelings of powerlessness coupled with lack of trust in governments is increasing climate anxiety in young people
- Gender location and class not currently determined as a predictor of climate anxiety (although also an under-researched area).

(Davis et al, 2021; Whitmarsh et al 2022; Hickman et al, 2021).

Vulnerability and exacerbation

- Children, teenagers and young people
- Those already diagnosed with mental health disorders.
- People who have a strong bond with ecosystems that are in flux: e.g. indigenous peoples, farmers, fishermen, hunters.
- Those who exercise in nature and those whose religious beliefs are connected to nature.
- People who are involved in ecological / climate campaigning and research.
- People with stronger environmental values more anxious.



There is no specific diagnosis of 'Eco-anxiety' and the relationship with other forms of anxiety are not yet well understood (Whitmarsh, 2022).

It is a frame for collective, social and global concern (Hickman, 2019)

An emotional gateway for understanding complex responses to multiple crises, and a recognisable term to allow us to speak with others (Hickman, 2020).



Emotional and rational response

“It would seem irrational not to have a heightened state of concern and anxiety when living with such ominous threats. In essence, **eco-anxiety is an indicator that our relationship with the beyond-human natural world is changing**—quickly, significantly, and on many levels”.

(Passmore 2022)

Responding to eco-anxiety

Emotion-focused coping:
reducing negative affect

Problem-focused coping:
Targeting the cause of
the stress practically

Meaning-focused coping:
development of trust in
others to act

Associated with
development of
pro-environmental
behaviours

Transforming mindsets for climate action

We help young people turn climate anxiety into action
work with leaders to drive intergenerational solutions

Meet the team

Explain and Send Screenshots
<https://www.forceofnature.xyz/>

"No research on a dead planet": preserving the socio-ecological conditions for academia

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CLIMATE CAFE

Take some time out.

This **climate cafe** is open to academic and professional services staff working on **climate science and policy** and **environmental research**. A safe and open space to share feelings and concerns about the climate and ecological crisis. Climate cafes are welcoming and confidential spaces where people meet in small groups without judgement, advice or guest speakers.



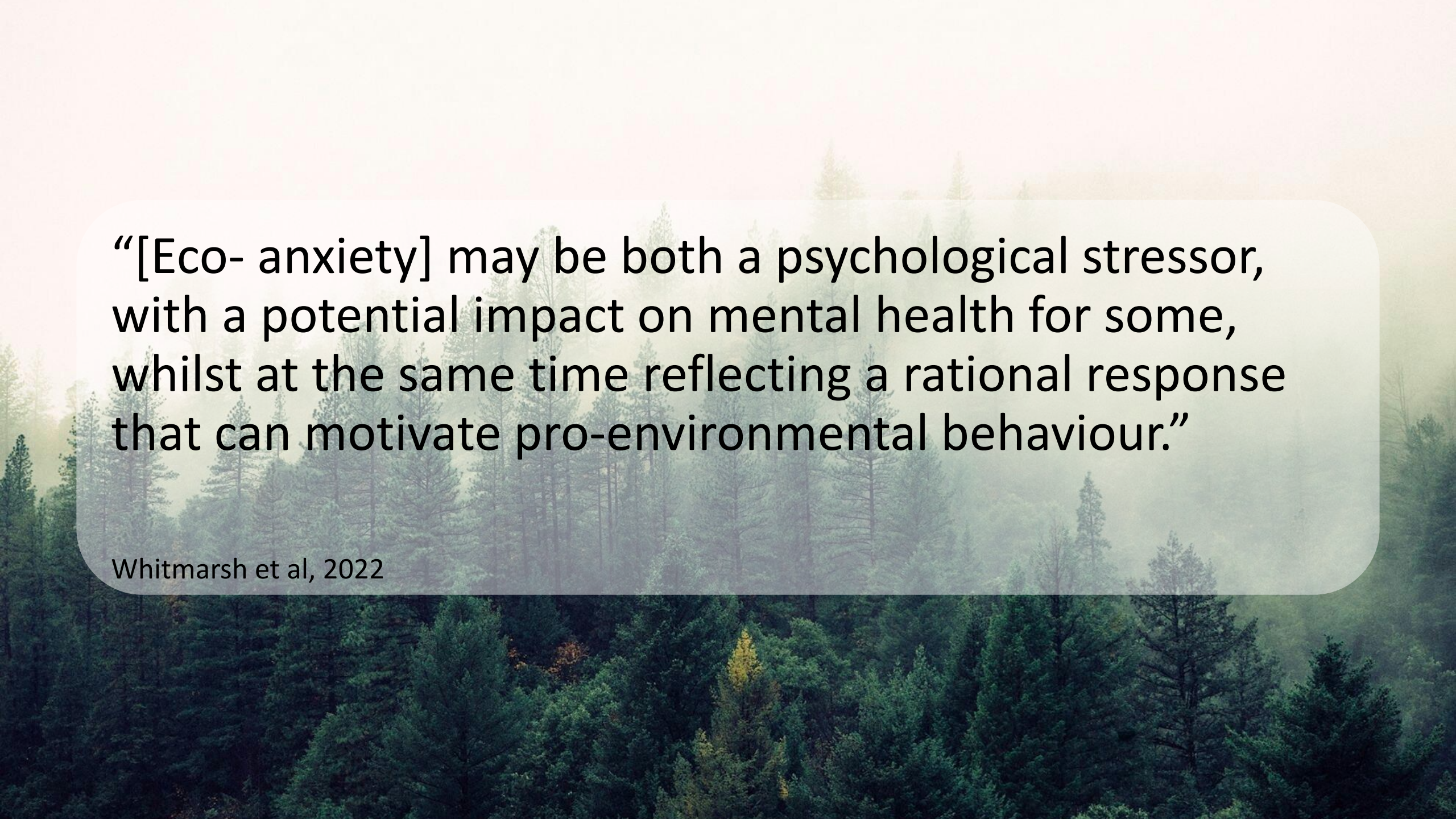
Each cafe is hosted by two facilitators trained by the Climate Psychology Alliance. Refreshments are provided.

If you have any questions about access, are interested in attending but the timings don't work for you or have any other queries email: infoGSI@exeter.ac.uk

www.exeterclimatecafe.org

up at

items



“[Eco- anxiety] may be both a psychological stressor, with a potential impact on mental health for some, whilst at the same time reflecting a rational response that can motivate pro-environmental behaviour.”

Whitmarsh et al, 2022

Art and Agency: Eco-anxiety and creative responses to the climate and ecological emergency

- The project aimed to:

“...better understand how creativity and the arts can help people to engage with issues relating to the climate and ecological emergency. In particular we are interested to understand more about how the arts can help strengthen people’s ability to take action on environmental issues”.

- Eight sessions, mostly held at Positive Lights Project on Sidwell Street, Exeter.
- Group of 11 participants, most of who were creative practitioners, or with an interest in the role of creativity to explore eco-anxiety.
- More from Chloe later about what we did... but these are sessions that involved group sharing, discussion and some form of make.



Approach and Methods for Evaluation

Research design:

- Qualitative, ethnographic approach to evaluation
- Positionality of researchers
- Ethical considerations and consent process
- Evolving roles

Methods:

- Rapid research review
- Participant observation at 8 X 3-hour sessions
- Journaling
- Session feedback
- Exit conversations of circa 45 minutes



Exit Conversations

- Can you briefly tell me about your **background in the creative arts**, what you specialise in and what you're working on at the moment?
- Tell me **why you wanted to get involved** with the project?
- Can you tell me **what eco-anxiety means to you** and how you feel it impacts on your practice?
- Broadly, what has been your **experience of taking part**?
- Is there anything which has emerged from the sessions which you've been able to **apply beyond the group**?
- How would you like **to share what you have experienced**?
- Did you **discover anything about yourself** or your own practice?
- What have you **valued or been inspired by**?
- What have you **found challenging**, frustrating or been disrupted by?
- What would you like to **do next / take forward**?



Initial Findings

An 'ongoing conversation' in a valued space:

"I think the beauty was probably in it not appearing like a method as well that that's it. It felt like an ongoing conversation between us of how we did different things and other people inputted their beautiful techniques for doing certain things."

An 'outpouring of grief' in a safe space:

"Despite it being really difficult challenging and painful, I came out of it feeling rejuvenated because I had been in that room with other people...using the same sort of language ... so it wasn't just me having to deal with that, in my own head."

A recognition of 'deep co-production':

"We needed to get there together. We needed it. We needed that even deeper coproduction process than I had anticipated. And for me, that was really important and powerful."

A responsive space:

"there was a kindness in the room, you could feel it, it wasn't ego driven. It felt different to so many other groups I have been in where people are out to prove themselves or a certain service in some way."

An open and creative mind

"I think it's important to have a space where you can leave your thinking head out of it, and just come with an open and creative mind"

'It's not yours, it's shared'

"[Doing the journalling] was a good process... you don't own it. It's not yours. It's shared. I looked at what the person had written before and whether it sparked something that I thought I could respond to... often it would be the most random things that went in there."

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How to BURY the GIANT

The Mossy Carpet



Many thanks!

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Selected Further Reading and References

- Caroline Hickman (2020) We need to (find a way to) talk about ... Ecoanxiety, *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 34:4, 411-424, DOI: 10.1080/02650533.2020.1844166
- Panu Pihkala (2020) Eco-anxiety and environmental education. *Sustainability*
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- Holli-Anne Passmore, Paul K. Lutz & Andrew J. Howell (2022): Eco-Anxiety: A Cascade of Fundamental Existential Anxieties, *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, DOI:10.1080/10720537.2022.2068706
- Climate Change and Mental Health Policy Brief (WHO)
- Coffey et al (2021) Understanding Eco-anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps
- Whitmarsh et al (2022) Climate anxiety: What predicts it and how is it related to climate action? *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 83 (2022) 101866