

Impact of Climate Change and Other Ecological Challenges on Individual Well-Being

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Received: 05-June-2023, Manuscript No. CEP-22-01-PreQc-22; **Editor assigned:** 07-June-2023, Pre QC No. CEP-22-01-PreQc-22 (PQ);

Reviewed: 18-June-2023, QC No. CEP-22-01-PreQc-22; **Revised:** 26-June-2022, Manuscript No. CEP-22-01-PreQc-22 (R); **Published:** 05-July-2023, DOI: 10.35248/2471-2701.22.9.6.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has become a topic of academic inquiry as well as an element of politics and news reporting. With worry on the rise, it should come as no surprise that psychologists are concerned. There are already several climate psychology centres in the Nordic nations, but their concentration is not solely on individual well-being.

Kristofer Ahlstrom, a Swedish journalist, recently sparked national interest in Sweden by admitting to suffering from climate anxiety in an article published in Dagens Nyheter.

After a summer of all-consuming news about floods in Central Europe, forest fires, and record-breaking heatwaves in North America, he recounted his sentiments, which culminated in a very disappointing IPCC climate report.

"I looked for the techniques I'd learned in therapy in the back of my mind. I've been seeing a psychologist for about six months to help me deal with my climate anxiety," Ahlstrom added. "If I'm being completely honest, the outcomes have been limited. I'm still angry, and I'm in the second of five stages of grief. I can't even think about the climate, let alone talk about it, without my brain tightening up."

Climate psychology has not become a special branch of psychology, but it uses its methods and know-how. Many Swedish psychologists clearly see a role for themselves in the current debate about climate change.

Kali Andersson is a partner at one of the two Swedish Climate Psychology centres currently operating. Anderson, who is the author of a book entitled *Climate Psychology (Klimatpsykologi)*, admits that she herself suffered from climate anxiety [1,2].

Climate psychology is not a distinct branch of psychology, but it does make use of its methods and knowledge. Many Swedish psychologists regard themselves as having a role to play in the present climate change debate.

Kali Andersson is a partner at one of the two climate psychology centres in Sweden that are currently operational. Anderson, who wrote the book *Climate Psychology (Klimatpsykologi)*, admits to have had climate anxiety herself.

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Some people can benefit from climate anxiety, while others are unable to. "Some people become overwhelmed and stuck in anxiety," Anderson's partner at the Climate Psychology Centre, Frida Hylander, explains.

"Handling information on climate issues can be challenging if one already has a tendency toward worry or other psychological disorders. Then you may require psychological assistance."

Kari Andersson and Kristoffer Ahlström took part in a recent Omvarlden, a Swedish worldwide news website, podcast conversation. The huge response to Ahlstrom's piece surprised him, he claimed. Many people inquired about what they might do to combat climate change.

Andersson considers it a good thing when people's anger or pain is channelled into action. And this is where her experience may help the organizations and businesses with which she collaborates.

Although her centre still receives some people, they are increasingly focusing on providing advice to organisations and businesses [3,4].

"When it comes to climate change, we aim to use psychology to help transform society," Andersson told UNRIC.

"We need to apply psychology, as well as our understanding of how people think and motivate themselves, and how systems work.

This is something we apply to groups that are already working on these challenges. What we're doing is assisting these businesses in becoming more efficient and effective through the use of psychological principles. Most people find it difficult to take in the knowledge, assimilate it, and begin action since climate change and other ecological challenges are so sad or existential," she explained.

This is where climate psychologists may make a difference by analyzing how information reaches people in the most efficient manner and encouraging behaviour analysis. She provides a specific example.

"Some organisations may wish to promote the usage of public transportation. Will a public awareness campaign, on the other hand, be effective?"

Do people already know about it? Are there any elements at work that aren't related to a lack of knowledge? We inquire as to why individuals do not like to ride the bus, and then we encourage our clients to consider whether more cycle lanes might be more beneficial in the long run." Andersson clarifies.

The data is available in the context of climate change as a whole. The reactions to the IPCC's recent comprehensive report, according to Kristoffer Ahlstrom, should have spurred policymakers to take drastic measures.

"I'm not sure what else is required to elicit a genuine response. But there's a chance we'll have to deal with it," he stated in a Dagens Nyheter article.

The weather has long been a popular topic of discussion in the northern hemisphere. It has previously been seen as a non-controversial and apolitical subject. That was, until lately, the case. Weather has now become a political issue as well. There is even debate in Sweden over whether it is appropriate for weather presenters to appear so cheerful when the weather is so bleak.

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