



Relationship Between Eco-Anxiety and Student Attitude Towards Environmental Protection at Secondary Level in Mirpur Aj&K

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission: August 25, 2026 Revised: September 06, 2026 Accepted: September 22, 2026 Available Online: October 02, 2026 Keywords: Eco-anxiety, climate change, school students, environmental attitude, educational policy, adolescent mental health. Corresponding author: Dr. Razia Rizve Email: razia.edu@must.edu.pk	Youth are often affected by eco-anxiety, a long-term sense of fear of environmental catastrophe, which is frequently driven by the worsening environmental situation all over the world. With the importance of the adolescent population in the future sustainability, this quantitative research explores the relationship between the level of eco-anxiety of the school student and what attitudes they have towards protecting the environment after facing the problem. A cross-sectional survey design was used where data was collected from a sample of 316 school children in Mirpur region. Correlation and regression analysis techniques were used to analyze the data. Results showed that there was a high and moderate positive correlation between the eco-anxiety of school students and positive environmental attitudes ($r = .451$; $p < 0.001$). Specifically, it was found that eco-anxiety was a significant predictor of pro-environmental attitude ($\beta = [0.257]$, $p < 0.001$). For young learners, psychological distress regarding environment is sometimes accompanied by a pro-active engagement instead of just paralysis, the findings indicate. The study suggests that teacher preparation and school-based interventions centered on 'transformative environmental pedagogy' could be incorporated into the curriculum in order to equip teachers with the opportunity to support students to turn their anxiety into constructive and sustainable action.

Introduction

The younger generation is increasingly concerned about the environment, a worry that is highly expressed as 'eco-anxiety' a feeling of worry, fear and helplessness in response to the environmental crisis. In recent years, environmental issues like pollution, deforestation and climate change have become a major concern as it affects the future of the planet. This heightened awareness has given grow to the term "eco-anxiety," which refers to the continuous anxiety of environmental catastrophe. Eco-anxiety is growing, particularly amongst young people, as they become increasingly aware of major environmental issues and the long-term impacts of these crises (Clayton, 2020). This phenomenon is a psychological one, and it is not only an individual issue, but also a developing social issue related to general attitudes and behaviours towards the environment.

The impacts of climate change on global ecosystems and human health are very serious (IPCC, 2022). The link between climate change and the probability of extreme weather events and the impacts of extreme weather on health is increasingly being established. The direct impacts of extreme acute weather and the indirect impacts of long-term climate change on social, economic and ecological systems are the primary ways climate change influences health. Respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, food- and

waterborne infections, and hunger are all area specific causes of excess mortality during heat waves, floods, storms, droughts, and hurricanes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) identified several indirect impacts such as migration of infectious diseases, water and food shortages, economic and food insecurity, forced displacement, and increased mental health risks. For this to happen, the methodologies of psychological research should be analyzed to understand the effects of eco-anxiety on students' attitudes towards environmental protection. Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed a very popular framework in the field of eco-anxiety studies, which is called thematic analysis, and which is a structured way of sorting out and categorizing how people feel and how they deal with their emotions. They have helped in understanding how climate anxiety is distributed across various populations and what coping measures people in these groups are taking to protect themselves from climate changes. Building on this, Brown, White and Nicholas (2021) explored climate-related stress amongst healthcare professionals and proposed the need to identify the phenomenon as a public health problem. They highlighted the need to consider the environment within mental health care, including counselling and therapeutic approaches.

Children and adolescents are especially susceptible to the psychological impacts of climate change, as noted in (Burke & Van Hoorn 2018). Their work showed that early exposure to environmental crisis would result in chronic stress and depression-like symptoms and anxiety. They believe that proactive measures like climate education, emotional regulation strategies, and environmental engagement initiatives can help reduce the harmful impacts of climate distress on youth. Their results corroborate other studies showing that educating and involving youth in activism can help build resilient attitudes towards eco-anxiety.

As climate change and environmental degradation have become more prevalent, eco-anxiety has been growing, a psychological state of distress and fear about the future of the planet (Chung et al., 2023). The phenomenon is a growing one amongst young people, especially students, who are well conscious of the issues of sustainability and its long-term effects (Jang & Lee, 2023).

Previous studies have identified that eco-anxiety may lead to positive environmental attitudes and behaviours or become a barrier to being apathetic and inactive. Such a juxtaposition reinforces the importance of understanding the impact of eco-anxiety on students' attitudes towards environmental protection. Research indicates that students who have greater knowledge of environmental issues are more likely to be engaged in sustainable practices. The relationship between psychological stress (eco-anxiety) and proactive behavior is not simple, however, as psychological stress can also impede proactive behavior (Hickman et al., 2021).

An important research aspect is the connection between eco-anxiety and attitudes toward environmental protection, especially in the pressing times when environmental degradation is a concern. There is a need to investigate this relationship to gain insights into how schools and policies can help students take positive action against eco-anxiety. It can help shape a generation that is not only environmentally conscious but also psychologically resilient (Ojala, 2022), by fostering a positive attitude towards being environmentally responsible.

The study aims to draw meaningful conclusions from previous studies and the emerging trends that can be helpful when integrating EE and mental health support so students can be agents of change.

Statement Of The Problem

There has never been a more pressing need to look after the mental health of students, as environmental issues like climate change and pollution are increasingly impacting their well-being and causing them to feel a sense of fear and worry regarding the state of their environment (known as eco-anxiety by the American Psychological Association). Many young people feel worried and helpless about the future of the planet, according to Hickman et al. (2021)

The effect of eco-anxiety on students' attitude towards environmental protection, however, has not yet been explored. Some students may feel more responsible towards the environment, while others may feel overwhelmed and disengaged. For this reason, this study seeks to explore the relationship between the two to understand how one can be directed toward positive environmental action, instead of psychological distress, when studying eco-anxiety.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the prevalence of awareness about eco-anxiety in secondary school students in AJ&K, Mirpur.
2. To find students' attitude towards environmental protection and the intention to buy green.

3. To explore the correlation between awareness about eco-anxieties and students' attitudes towards environmental protection and purchasing green products.

Research Questions

1. Are the students from Secondary School in Mirpur AJ&K aware of eco-anxiety?
2. What is the attitude of the students to environmental protection and the intention to buy green?
3. Is there any relationship between the awareness about eco-anxiety and the attitude of the students towards the protection of the environment and their intention to purchase?

Research Hypotheses

(H01): No correlation was found between awareness on Eco-anxiety and attitudes toward environmental protection behaviors of students.

(H02): Student Purchase intentions are not related to awareness of Eco-anxiety.

Significance Of The Study

This study will help in understanding about eco-anxiety and its effects on students' attitudes towards protecting nature. In doing so, researcher will discover how to assist students in addressing their concerns and inspire them to make positive changes for the environment. Research findings will be of value to schools and teachers. The study will help them develop programs that lessen the anxiety and educate students on how to take care of the environment. The findings from this study will also be valuable in shaping policy strategies for making youth feel empowered to be part of a greener future. In summary, the results of the present study will contribute to the mental health of students and motivate them to contribute to saving the Earth through their actions.

Literature Review

Education is a key driver of the students' perceptions and responses to environmental challenges. EE in school curricula enables embedding the values of sustainability and ecological stewardship. Experiential learning, for example, through involvement in conservation projects or field trips, has been found to influence attitudes and actions of learners (Tilbury, 2011).

Furthermore, teachers who are prepared to discuss eco-anxiety in their environmental education are able to guide students to take productive steps instead of dwelling on their negative feelings. Educational programs can help to alleviate feelings of helplessness and equip students with the ability to positively impact environmental conservation through critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Stevenson et al., 2021).

Hickman et al. (2021) highlight eco-anxiety as an important new psychological phenomenon, particularly among youth, who are more likely to be aware of the decline in the environment. These demographers were very sensitive to the long term effects of climate change as it directly impacts their futures, leading to greater anxiety. Youth Eco-anxiety can be accompanied by feelings of helplessness and frustration when other authorities, including governments, are not seen as taking action to mitigate climate crises.

The relationship between eco-anxiety and student attitudes towards environmental protection is multifaceted and complex. Eco-anxiety may be a motivation for positive change, but it can also cause emotional response and inaction, if not effectively managed. Future studies should include longitudinal research which would provide more information about these dynamics and implementing interventions by using eco-anxiety as an incentive to change behaviour towards sustainable practices (Clayton et al., 2021).

In a social-ecological approach, Crandon et al. (2022) analyzed the effects of social networks and media on children and adolescent's eco-anxiety. They discovered that information about climate change can generate environmental activism, but too much information on climate crisis can cause emotional exhaustion and despair. They recommended that balanced and solution-oriented approaches to communicating climate change can help ease anxiety while fostering constructive engagement.

Theoretical Perspective

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) suggests that people feel mentally uncomfortable when their actions are in contradiction to their beliefs or knowledge. Eco-anxiety can make it difficult for students to experience internal conflict when they do not take actions to be environmentally responsible. This discomfort can drive behavior change – here, for instance, the adoption of sustainable practices, which will enable action to be in line with beliefs. Research shows that educating about this dissonance has the potential to foster environmental stewardship (Clayton, 2020).

Stress and Coping Theory

The Stress and Coping Theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) offers insights into the coping mechanisms used when encountering psychological stress, such as eco-anxiety. In this theory, people interpret stressor and use problem-focused and/or emotion-focused coping responses. Eco-anxiety students can use coping strategies to respond to the trigger for the anxiety, such as advocacy or community participation. Good coping strategies will improve their attitudes and behaviors towards environmental protection (Reser & Swim, 2011).

All in all, the current literature shows that eco-anxiety is an emerging issue with broad mental health, attitude and policy implications. Although the worry about the climate crisis can be overwhelming, there is evidence that specific actions, education, and activism can turn climate anxiety into climate action. To create strategies to help people dealing with the psychological aspects of climate change, one has to understand this aspect, so that their fears do not become paralyzing, but motivate them to take action that can have a long-term impact on their environment. The findings of this literature review emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach to tackling eco-anxiety, which includes psychological support, policy changes, and environmental education, to build resiliency and proactive engagement.

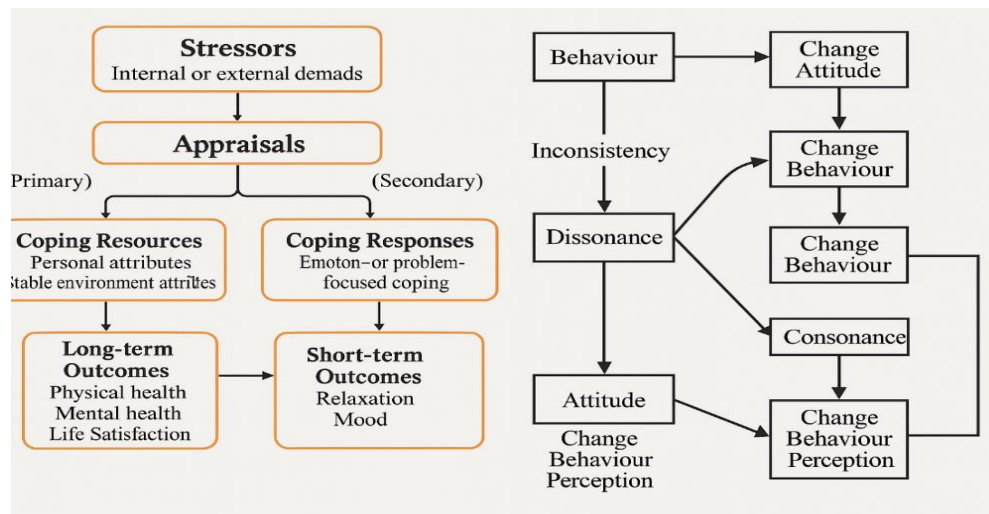


Figure 1: Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Stress and Coping Theory

Methodology

It was descriptive, correlational survey design that was used in this research to find out the level of environmental awareness and its correlation to pro-environmental behavior among future teachers. Descriptive design was used to describe the status of variables, while correlational design helped in the creation of relationships between the variables without making the causality assumption (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population

All public schools of Mirpur were used as population for this study. Considering Cochran Formula all the students of public secondary level in Mirpur District (Grades 9-10) are the target of the study. Table:3.1 Population of Secondary school students of boys

Secondary schools Students of Mirpur AJ&K	9 th	10 th
Boys	362	336
Girls	403	385
Total	1468	

A sample size of 316 was determined using Cochran's sample size formula with finite population correction. The calculation assumed a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and maximum variability ($p = 0.5$). The adjusted sample size accounts for the finite population of 1486 and practical considerations such as non-response, ensuring adequate representation.

Validity And Reliability

The Research instrument self constructed questionnaire comprised of three section with 25 items based on five point likert scale was checked by the experts of the department of Education .e. Dr. Saira Farooq Shah Assistant Professor and Lecturer Miss. Kiran Saleem.

Before the major data collection, pilot testing was done to examine the clarity, reliability, and structure of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha of 100 sample size was tested and it was found that the alpha values was 0.80 and therefore, the measures were found highly reliable (Sürücü, & Maslakçi, 2020).

Results and Discussions

S.NO	To find the prevalence of awareness regarding eco-anxiety among Secondary School students in Mirpur AJ&K	Mean	Std. Deviation	Awareness Level
1	Industrialization make the climate more polluted	4.1519	.74899	High
2	Billion tree plan and plantation steps is key role in environmental protection	4.1962	.65182	High
3	Solar system and e-vehicle actively minimize the use of fossil fuel and save the weather.	4.2563	.86233	Very High
4	By using renewable resource (solar and wind energy), we can easily save the environment	4.2943	.64643	Very High
5	Plastic product is adversely effect the equatic life	4.3797	.90927	Very High
6	Due to climate change sowing pattern of crops is gradually changing	4.3734	.63730	Very High
7	I am concerned about future of the environment	4.0949	.74568	High
8	Suicidal bacteria (pseudomonas) and plastic (conifer) producing plant can minimize the climate change	3.8196	.74901	High
9	I actively support environment protection campaign	3.7753	1.36049	High
10	I am involved to giving awareness related to use of biodegradable` product (paper, plastic metal etc.)	4.1804	1.19086	High
	Cummulative mean	41.5222	8.50217	High

Prevalence of awareness regarding eco-anxiety

The table shows that participants generally agreed with all environmental statements, with the highest support for the harmful impact of plastics and the benefits of renewable energy. Mean values mostly ranged above 4, reflecting strong agreement, while lower means for environmental campaigns and biotechnological solutions indicated mixed opinions. Standard deviations revealed that some items, such as renewable resources, had consistent responses, whereas issues like active campaign support showed greater variation, suggesting differing levels of personal involvement.

S. No.	To identify students' attitude towards environmental protection.	Mean	Std. D	Interpretation
1	I am worried about abrupt climate change	3.9620	.84618	Positive
2	I need to seek out information related to climate change in the media (TV, newspaper, internet).	4.0665	1.08906	Positive
3	I involve in the environment protection activities that occurred in school.	3.8671	1.17165	Positive
4	I try to save energy by avoiding the unnecessary use of electric appliance and fossil fuel.	4.0570	.65459	Positive
5	I am worried about spooky decrease in the plantation and forest.	4.3861	.97084	Highly Positive
6	Everyone is responsible to save the environment.	4.4905	.64972	Highly Positive
7	It is necessary to conserve natural resources.	4.3449	.63095	Highly Positive
8	I think global warming is chiefly disturbing component of climate.	4.0570	.47468	Positive
9	I know about climate change.	4.1709	.57119	Positive
10	I avoid unnecessary use of water resources.	4.3386	.54268	Highly Positive
		41.7405	7.60153	Positive

Attitude towards environmental protection and green purchase

The analysis indicates that respondents generally showed strong agreement toward environmental protection and conservation, with high mean scores and relatively low standard deviations reflecting consistent views. While overall awareness and concern were strong, some variation appeared in responses related to practical engagement and information-seeking, suggesting differences in the level of individual involvement.

S.NO.	To highlight green purchase intention of students.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
1	I use environmental friendly goods during my travelling.	4.3766	.73070	Always
2	I avoid unnecessary use of water resources.	4.3386	.54268	Always
3	Individual transport is dangerous for weather than pooling (groups) and public transport.	4.2278	.52733	Always
4	I prefer biodegradable (easily decompose) bags during shopping.	4.2911	.56122	Always
5	I purchase products that less harmful to environment.	4.4968	.51945	Always
6	Using environment friendly product is effective way to reduce pollution.	4.4873	.54902	Always
		26.2184	3.43041	Always
	Average	4.3600	.57000	Always

Green Purchase Intention and Perceived Behavior Control

This cumulative table highlights that respondent expressed consistently high agreement with environmentally responsible behaviors, as reflected by mean scores above 4.0 across all items. The relatively low standard deviations indicate limited variation, suggesting that participants shared similar views and showed strong consensus on the importance of eco-friendly practices.

Correlation between eco anxiety among student intentions to engage in environmental protection behavior

		Perception	Attitude	purchase
Perception	Pearson Correlation	1	.579**	-.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.241
	N	316	316	316
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	.579**	1	.364**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	316	316	316

Purchase	Pearson Correlation	-.066	.364**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.241	.000	
	N	316	316	316

The results of the correlation test suggest the strength of the correlation between students' feelings of eco-anxiety and their intention to take pro-environmental actions. If there was a significant positive correlation, it would indicate that as students' eco-anxiety increases, their intention to act environmentally responsibly increases, whereby the more concerned or anxious students about the environment are also more motivated to act responsibly. By contrast, a low and non-significant correlation does mean that eco-anxiety does not necessarily influence behavioral intentions, but other factors, e.g., knowledge, attitudes, and/or social norms, may have a more impactful influence. Overall, this test gives an insight into whether a student's emotional reactions to environmental challenges (eco-anxiety) act as a motivator for him/her to engage in protective environmental behaviors.

Findings

The findings revealed that there was high level of eco-anxiety among secondary school students of Mirpur, AJ&K with cumulative mean of 41.52. Students expressed anxiety, sadness, powerlessness and overwhelmed by environmental concerns and information regarding environmental crisis issues. The mean of 4.51 is high, meaning that students are concerned about environmental degradation, and the mean of 4.29 is high, meaning that they also often feel overwhelmed by news and information about climate change and other environmental crises. In addition, the mean score of 4.02 suggests that students are frequently feeling guilty or responsible about environmental issues, even if it's in a miniscule way. Students had an overall positive to highly positive attitude, with a mean of 41.74, for the environmental protection attitudes. The mean value of 4.67 shows that there is a strong and proactive desire to participate in environmental protection activities, with the mean value of 4.15 showing that students understand the need for action and policy changes at a collective level to address environmental problems. The mean score, however, of 3.55 indicates some hesitation or barriers to practicing certain environmental behaviors, which may stem from limited resources or a lack of support within the community. Students also showed understanding of their own roles and responsibilities as a consumer, and their concern with deforestation, global warming and conservation efforts and reported participation in energy saving and conservation. Additionally, students were found to have consistently high pro-environmental purchasing behaviour with an average of 4.36 interpreted as "always", which means that students were found to prefer using sustainable consumption practices, biodegradable materials and eco-friendly products. The results of the correlation showed that eco-anxiety and environmental attitudes were positively correlated ($r = .579$, $p < .01$), indicating that the more eco-anxious a student was, the more positive their attitude towards protecting the environment was. A moderate positive correlation was also obtained between environmental attitudes and purchase behavior ($r = .364$, $p < .01$), meaning that the higher the environmental attitude, the more involved the people are in purchasing behavior that supports the environment. The correlation between eco-anxiety and purchase behavior was not statistically significant and was weak ($r = -.066$; $p = .241$), indicating that students' purchase behavior was not directly influenced by their eco-anxiety. The overall results indicate that, although students are highly concerned about environmental issues and have high level of eco-anxiety, their environmental practices, specifically, purchasing behavior, is more strongly linked with environmental attitudes than with environmental anxiety.

Conclusion

In general, students have positive attitudes towards the protection of the environment and are ready to support sustainability efforts. It seems that at the attitudinal level, eco-anxiety seems to have a motivational role; students with a higher level of eco-anxiety tend to have more pro-environmental attitudes. Eco-anxiety is not, however, directly correlated with pro-environmental behaviour, implying that there is an attitude – behaviour gap. The results indicate that environmental attitudes have a significant impact on green purchasing behavior, indicating that attitudes are one of the important mediating variables between environmental awareness and action. Generally, students' environmental attitudes and psychological involvement were found to be higher than their environmental behaviour, although their environmental behaviour seemed to be influenced more by their attitudes than by eco-anxiety. Students' eco-anxiety may be related to their consciousness and concern about the environment.

Recommendations

To take environmental awareness a step further, schools in Mirpur can organize tree plantation drives, recycling initiatives, and sustainability programs that involve students in hands-on efforts to help mitigate their anxiety and spark positive change. Schools could also offer workshops and peer support groups to help students learn to cope with eco-anxiety in an effective way, instead of getting overwhelmed by environmental worries. Local education departments may implement campaigns based on behaviours,

such as “plastic-free schools” and “green campus initiatives,” to help close the gap between positive environmental attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, teachers can learn how to integrate an environmental psychology perspective such as eco-anxiety and coping strategies to be included in classroom instruction, with the aim for students to learn healthier and more constructive coping mechanisms for engaging with an environment that creates anxiety. Schools could also provide additional support for student clubs, eco-societies and leadership programs to give students opportunities for leadership and problem-focused coping as opposed to passive concern. Last but not least, the local media and community leaders can spread positive environmental messages that emphasize the practical solutions and environmental success stories that help curb scares that could fuel anxiety without generating action.

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