

Eco-Anxiety and Coping Strategies: A Systematic Review of Psychological Responses to Climate Change

Sitti Rachma S. Tombolotutu^{1*}, Diah Karmiyati², Zainul Anwar³

Department of Psychology, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1017PSY0034>

Received: 01 June 2026; Accepted: 07 June 2026; Published: 17 June 2026

ABSTRACT

Eco-anxiety is a psychological response resulting from concerns about climate change and environmental degradation. This phenomenon relates to how individuals use coping strategies to manage the anxiety that arises. This study aims to identify forms of coping with eco-anxiety through a systematic review. The literature search was conducted using Publish or Perish and PubMed with a combination of Boolean operator-based keywords. Article selection followed the PRISMA guidelines and was assisted by the Rayyan application, with inclusion criteria focusing on articles from 2016–2026 that addressed eco-anxiety and coping. A total of 12 articles were analyzed. The results indicated that coping strategies include problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, social coping, collective coping, and maladaptive coping. Adaptive coping plays a role in enhancing hope, social support, and engagement with environmental issues, whereas maladaptive coping—such as avoidance, denial, distancing, and rumination—has the potential to increase psychological distress. These findings suggest that eco-anxiety is not always maladaptive but can serve as an adaptive response when individuals employ appropriate coping strategies.

Keywords: coping, eco-anxiety, systematic review

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has been recognized as one of the greatest global challenges of the 21st century, with far-reaching impacts on human life. Rising global temperatures, shifting weather patterns, melting polar ice, rising sea levels, and the increasing frequency of natural disasters are clear indicators of the unfolding climate crisis. The impacts of climate change are not only felt in environmental and economic aspects but are also beginning to be a serious concern in terms of the psychological well-being and mental health of communities. These conditions give rise to various emotional responses such as fear, worry, stress, and a sense of helplessness regarding the future of the environment and human life.

In recent years, attention to the psychological impacts of climate change has increased significantly, particularly in the fields of environmental psychology and mental health. One form of psychological response that has been widely discussed is eco-anxiety. According to Pihkala (2020), eco-anxiety is a form of anxiety that arises from awareness of the threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation. Eco-anxiety is characterized by feelings of worry, fear, sadness, frustration, and helplessness when individuals contemplate the future state of the environment. Although eco-anxiety has not yet been classified as a clinical mental disorder, this condition can constitute a form of psychological distress that affects an individual's well-being if experienced intensely and over an extended period.

The phenomenon of eco-anxiety is found among various groups of people around the world. However, children, adolescents, and young adults are considered to be more vulnerable to eco-anxiety because they are expected to face the long-term impacts of the climate crisis in the future. Research conducted by Hickman et al. (2021) on young respondents in various countries showed that the majority of participants reported feelings of sadness, fear, anger, and helplessness regarding climate change and felt that the government had not provided an adequate response to the environmental crisis. Additionally, a cross-national study by Ogunbode et al. (2022) found that climate anxiety is associated with perceptions of risk regarding climate change, direct experiences of

environmental impacts, and individual psychological well-being. These findings suggest that eco-anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors.

A number of studies also indicate that eco-anxiety is not always maladaptive. To a certain extent, eco-anxiety can serve as an adaptive emotional response because it can heighten individuals' awareness of environmental issues and encourage engagement in pro-environmental behaviors. Research by Verplanken et al. (2020) indicates that concerns about climate change can motivate individuals to take more constructive actions toward the environment when balanced with good emotional regulation skills. Additionally, research by Stanley et al. (2021) found that eco-anxiety can be associated with an individual's engagement in climate action and pro-environmental behavior. However, if not managed properly, eco-anxiety also has the potential to cause negative effects such as prolonged stress, hopelessness, emotional exhaustion, and a decline in psychological well-being.

In dealing with the psychological stress caused by climate change, coping strategies are a crucial factor in determining how individuals respond to eco-anxiety. Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals make to manage internal and external demands that are perceived as stressful or overwhelming (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Based on this theory, coping is generally categorized into problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping focuses on efforts to address the source of the problem directly, whereas emotion-focused coping aims to reduce the emotional distress arising from a specific situation. In the context of eco-anxiety, research indicates that individuals also employ other forms of coping, such as meaning-focused coping, social coping, and collective coping, to address anxiety related to climate change.

Coping strategies play a crucial role in determining the impact of eco-anxiety on an individual's psychological well-being. Research by Ojala (2012a) shows that meaning-focused coping and hope are associated with more positive environmental engagement and better psychological well-being among adolescents. Conversely, avoidant or denial-based coping strategies tend to be associated with higher levels of psychological distress. Additionally, social support is also a key factor in helping individuals cope with stress and anxiety related to climate change (Taylor, 2012). Therefore, understanding coping strategies is essential for determining how individuals maintain their mental health amid the growing threat of climate change.

As attention to ecological anxiety has grown, the number of studies on this topic has also increased significantly and spans various disciplines, such as psychology, public health, education, and environmental studies. A systematic review conducted by Léger-Goodes et al. (2022) indicates that research on ecological anxiety among adolescents has continued to increase in recent years. Additionally, Soutar and Wand (2022) found that anxiety responses to climate change take diverse forms and are influenced by various individual and social factors. However, these studies have largely focused on the psychological impacts of ecological anxiety and individual emotional responses, while research specifically synthesizing various coping strategies for addressing ecological anxiety remains limited.

Furthermore, research findings on coping with eco-anxiety remain inconsistent. Some studies emphasize the importance of meaning-focused coping and hope in improving psychological well-being, while others suggest that certain coping strategies may be associated with increased psychological distress. These variations are influenced by differences in participant characteristics, cultural contexts, research methods, and the theoretical approaches employed. This situation has resulted in the absence of an integrated picture regarding the most frequently used forms of coping or coping strategies that tend to be adaptive in dealing with eco-anxiety.

Given these circumstances, a systematic review is needed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical findings related to eco-anxiety and coping strategies. Through a systematic literature review approach, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the coping strategies individuals use to deal with eco-anxiety, the factors that influence them, and their implications for psychological well-being. This study utilizes multiple databases, namely Publish or Perish, which is linked to Google Scholar and PubMed, to ensure a broader and more relevant scope of the literature.

Study Method

This systematic review is based on the PRISMA guidelines to ensure that the process of identifying, selecting, and synthesizing the literature is conducted systematically and transparently. The literature search was conducted

from December 2025 to May 2026 using Google Scholar, accessed via the Publish or Perish application, and PubMed to identify articles relevant to the research objectives.

The search strategy was conducted systematically using a combination of keywords tailored to the research objectives. The primary keywords used included “eco-anxiety,” “climate anxiety,” “environmental anxiety,” and “coping.” The keyword combination was formulated using Boolean operators, specifically (“eco-anxiety” OR “climate anxiety” OR “environmental anxiety”) AND (“coping” OR “coping strategy”). The search was limited to articles published between 2016 and 2026, available in full text, and written in English.

All articles retrieved from both databases were then combined into a single dataset, and a deduplication process was conducted to avoid counting the same articles twice. The next step was an initial screening based on titles and abstracts to determine whether the topics aligned with the study’s focus, namely eco-anxiety and coping strategies. Irrelevant articles, such as those that only discuss climate change without psychological aspects or do not examine coping, were excluded at this stage.

Articles that passed the screening stage then proceeded to the eligibility stage through a full-text review. At this stage, selection was conducted using the Rayyan application to facilitate the process of filtering and grouping articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria in this study include: (1) articles that explicitly discuss eco-anxiety or climate anxiety, (2) articles that examine coping strategies or individual responses to eco-anxiety, and (3) articles published within a specified timeframe. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria include articles that are irrelevant to the focus of the study, do not discuss coping, are not available in full text, or are duplicates of other articles.

After completing all stages of the selection process, articles that met the inclusion criteria were further analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach. The analysis involved identifying the main themes emerging from each article, particularly regarding the forms of eco-anxiety and the coping strategies employed by individuals. Subsequently, the findings from each article were compared and integrated to gain a more comprehensive understanding of coping patterns in dealing with eco-anxiety.

Based on this entire process, a total of 12 articles that met the criteria were selected for analysis in this study. These articles were then organized into a matrix table to facilitate data synthesis and interpretation. The PRISMA flowchart for journal selection is shown in Figure 1.

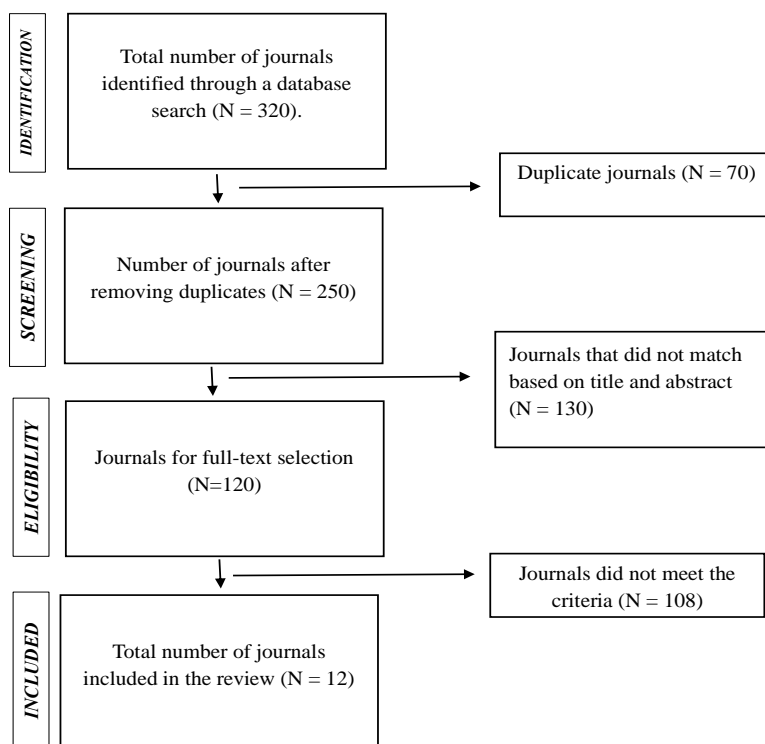


Figure 1. PRISMA Journal Selection Flowchart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that ecological anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that is increasingly being studied in the context of climate change and has complex and multidimensional characteristics. Generally, ecological anxiety is understood as an emotional response characterized by anxiety, worry, and uncertainty regarding deteriorating environmental conditions, which in some cases can impact an individual's psychological well-being (Pihkala, 2020; Clayton & Karazsia, 2020). Findings across studies also indicate that ecological anxiety is not limited to specific groups but is widespread globally and influenced by factors such as age, personal experiences with climate change, and perceptions of societal and governmental responses (Hickman et al., 2021; Ogunbode et al., 2022).

Table 1. List of Coping Strategies for Managing Eco-Anxiety

No	Author & Year	Study Design	Key Findings	Types of Coping
1	Clayton & Karazsia (2020)	Quantitative	Eco-anxiety causes distress and impaired functioning	Emotion-focused coping (managing negative emotions that arise)
2	Hickman et al. (2021)	Global survey	Eco-anxiety causes high levels of anxiety among young people	Emotion-focused coping (managing negative emotions that arise)
3	Ogunbode et al. (2022)	Cross-cultural	High levels of global concern	Collective coping (culture-based coping)
4	Stanley et al. (2021)	Quantitative	Rising eco-anxiety is making people more environmentally conscious	Problem-focused coping (taking steps to resolve the problem)
5	Hogg et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Rising eco-anxiety is prompting people to get involved in pro-environment actions	Collective coping/social coping (not dealing with environmental issues on one's own)
6	Bouman et al. (2018)	Experimental	Concern for the environment leads to pro-environmental action	Problem-focused coping (taking steps to resolve the problem)
7	Searle & Gow (2016)	Cross-sectional	Rising eco-anxiety is leading to increased distress	Emotion-focused coping (managing negative emotions that arise)
8	Maran & Begotti (2021)	Quantitative	Climate anxiety boosts self-efficacy, which drives pro-environmental action	Problem-focused coping (taking steps to resolve the problem)
9	Verplanken et al. (2020)	Quantitative	Worries about eco-anxiety will lead to action for the environment	Problem-focused coping (taking steps to resolve the problem)
10	Wullenkord et al. (2021)	Cross-sectional	Denial arises as a response	Maladaptive coping (excessive rumination)
11	Helm et al. (2018)	Cross-sectional	Because concern leads to sustainable behavior	Problem-focused coping (taking steps to resolve the problem)
12	Crandon, T. J., et al. (2026)	Quantitative	High levels of climate distress lead to high levels of meaning-focused coping, which ultimately fosters hope and improves well-being	Meaning-focused coping (an individual's efforts to find positive meaning)

The findings from 12 journals indicate that eco-anxiety is not always maladaptive. Some studies suggest that anxiety about climate change can serve as a motivator for individuals to engage in pro-environmental behaviors, such as participating in environmental movements and adopting lifestyle changes (Verplanken et al., 2020; Stanley et al., 2021). These findings suggest a relatively consistent pattern that eco-anxiety does not always have a negative impact on an individual's psychological well-being. Several studies found that anxiety about climate change can encourage engagement in pro-environmental behaviors and climate action (Stanley et al., 2021; Verplanken et al., 2020). However, other studies suggest that eco-anxiety can also increase psychological distress, particularly when individuals feel they lack control over the environmental issues they face (Searle & Gow, 2016). These differing findings indicate that the effects of eco-anxiety are likely influenced by other factors, such as the coping strategies employed, levels of perceived control, and the social support available to the individual.

In the context of coping strategies, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that are perceived to exceed an individual's resources. Based on the results of the analyzed journals, individuals employ several primary forms of coping when facing eco-anxiety, namely problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, meaning-focused coping, social coping, collective coping, and maladaptive coping.

Problem-focused coping is a strategy that focuses on direct actions to address the source of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the context of eco-anxiety, this form of coping manifests through participation in environmental activities, sustainable lifestyle changes, waste reduction, and advocacy for environmental policies (Maran & Begotti, 2021). This strategy helps individuals increase their perceived control over environmental issues.

Emotion-focused coping is a strategy aimed at managing emotional responses to stressors, such as reducing anxiety, fear, or sadness (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the context of eco-anxiety, this strategy involves emotional regulation, acceptance of negative emotions, and management of psychological distress.

Meaning-focused coping refers to an individual's efforts to construct positive meaning, maintain hope, and find reasons to remain optimistic in the midst of a crisis (Folkman, 2008). These findings are supported by Ojala's (2012) research, which found that constructive hope is positively associated with environmental engagement among adolescents. Furthermore, Ojala (2012a) also demonstrated that meaning-focused coping is associated with higher psychological well-being and lower levels of distress. Research by Crandon et al. (2026) also indicates that meaning-focused coping is one of the most prominent adaptive coping strategies for addressing climate distress.

Social coping is a coping strategy that involves seeking emotional and instrumental support from others (Taylor, 2012). In the context of eco-anxiety, this form of coping includes support from family, friends, and the community, which helps individuals reduce feelings of isolation (Léger-Goodes et al., 2022). Although both involve social interaction, social coping focuses on seeking interpersonal support, whereas collective coping emphasizes engagement in collective action to address environmental threats collectively. Additionally, a form of collective coping has been identified, namely coping strategies carried out through collective action to address collective stressors. This concept aligns with the "tend-and-befriend" theory by Taylor et al. (2000), which explains that individuals can respond to stress through social affiliation and group support. In the context of eco-anxiety, collective coping is manifested through involvement in environmental movements, collective actions, joint advocacy, and community participation (Maran & Begotti, 2021).

The findings of this study indicate that the effectiveness of coping strategies is determined not only by the level of eco-anxiety experienced by individuals, but also by their ability to interpret environmental threats, build social support, and maintain the belief that their actions can have a positive impact. Thus, eco-anxiety can be understood as a dynamic psychological response, the outcome of which is significantly influenced by the coping strategies employed.

In addition to adaptive coping strategies, several studies have also identified maladaptive coping—coping strategies that tend not to resolve the source of stress and instead worsen an individual’s psychological condition in the long term (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Forms of maladaptive coping identified include avoidance, denial, distancing, impaired emotional regulation, and rumination. Ojala’s (2012b) research indicates that de-emphasizing strategies—or the tendency to downplay or minimize the perceived severity of climate change—are associated with lower levels of environmental engagement, while Crandon et al. (2026) found that distancing and de-emphasizing are linked to increased psychological distress. Furthermore, research by Hogg et al. (2021) indicates that rumination is one of the common maladaptive responses found in individuals with eco-anxiety.

In addition to coping factors, several studies indicate that environmental values and concerns also influence how individuals respond to eco-anxiety. A study by Bouman et al. (2018) found that individuals with high biospheric values tend to exhibit greater pro-environmental behavior. Additionally, Helm et al. (2018) explain that environmental concern can lead to two possible responses: it may promote psychological adaptation when individuals feel they have control, or it may increase distress when concerns are not balanced by adequate adaptive capacity.

Overall, the results of this systematic review indicate that eco-anxiety is a complex psychological response to environmental crises. Its effects can be either maladaptive or adaptive, depending on environmental values, perceived control, social support, and the coping strategies employed. Coping strategies that are active, meaningful, social, and collective tend to have a more positive impact on psychological well-being while encouraging individual engagement in environmental action, whereas maladaptive coping tends to increase psychological distress in the long term.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of a systematic review of 12 journals, it can be concluded that eco-anxiety is a psychological response that arises from increased individual awareness of the environmental crisis and climate change. Eco-anxiety is not always negative; while in some individuals it can lead to psychological distress such as anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and rumination, in others it can serve as a catalyst for pro-environmental behavior and active engagement in environmental issues. These findings indicate that eco-anxiety is complex and multidimensional, and thus cannot be understood merely as a form of psychological disorder.

The review findings also indicate that coping strategies play a significant role in determining how individuals respond to eco-anxiety. Problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, meaning-focused coping, social coping, and collective coping tend to help individuals adapt more healthily to environmental anxiety. On the other hand, maladaptive coping strategies such as avoidance, denial, distancing, and rumination have the potential to exacerbate psychological distress in the long term. Among these various strategies, meaning-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and collective coping appear to be the most adaptive because they can increase hope, social engagement, and concrete action regarding environmental issues.

In addition to coping strategies, other factors such as environmental values, perceived control, constructive expectations, and social support also play a role in shaping individuals’ responses to eco-anxiety. Therefore, addressing eco-anxiety requires not only individual clinical approaches but also preventive and community-based approaches that can strengthen psychological resilience and encourage collective engagement in environmental issues.

Although research on eco-anxiety continues to grow, the findings of this review indicate that several research gaps remain. Most of the studies identified used cross-sectional designs, which are unable to account for changes in eco-anxiety and coping strategies over time. Furthermore, the majority of research has been conducted in Western countries, while studies in the context of developing countries, including Indonesia, remain very limited. Variations in conceptual definitions and measurement instruments for eco-anxiety across studies also make comparing results more complex. Therefore, future research should employ longitudinal designs and incorporate more diverse cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between eco-anxiety and coping strategies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bouman, T., Steg, L., & Kiers, H. A. L. (2018). Measuring values in environmental research: A test of an environmental portrait value questionnaire. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 595. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00564>
2. Clayton, S., & Karazsia, B. T. (2020). Development and validation of a measure of climate change anxiety. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 69, 101434. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101434>
3. Crandon, T. J., Scott, J. G., Charlson, F. J., & Thomas, H. J. (2026). Coping with climate change: Correlates of adaptive and maladaptive coping in young people. *Chronic Stress*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/24705470261437486>
4. Folkman, S. (2008). The case for positive emotions in the stress process. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 21(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615800701740457>
5. Helm, S. V., Pollitt, A., Barnett, M. A., Curran, M. A., & Craig, Z. R. (2018). Differentiating environmental concern in the context of climate change. *Global Environmental Change*, 59, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2017.11.012>
6. Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., Wray, B., Mellor, C., & van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: A global survey. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(12), e863–e873. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3)
7. Hogg, T. L., Stanley, S. K., O'Brien, L. V., Wilson, M. S., & Watsford, C. R. (2021). The Hogg Eco-Anxiety Scale: Development and validation of a multidimensional scale. *Global Environmental Change*, 71, 102391. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102391>
8. Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
9. Léger-Goodes, T., Paquin, V., & Généreux, M. (2022). Eco-anxiety in youth: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 6, 100136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2022.100136>
10. Maran, D. A., & Begotti, T. (2021). Media exposure to climate change, anxiety, and efficacy beliefs in a sample of Italian university students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(17), 9358. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18179358>
11. Ojala, M. (2012a). Hope and climate change: The importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people. *Environmental Education Research*, 18(5), 625–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2011.637157>
12. Ojala, M. (2012b). How do children cope with global climate change? Coping strategies, engagement, and well-being. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 32(3), 225–233. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2012.02.004>
13. Ogunbode, C. A., Doran, R., Böhm, G., Broomell, S. B., Demski, C., Poortinga, W., & van den Broek, K. L. (2022). Climate anxiety, wellbeing and pro-environmental action: Correlates of negative emotional responses to climate change in 32 countries. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 84, 101887. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101887>
14. Pihkala, P. (2020). Anxiety and the ecological crisis: An analysis of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety. *Sustainability*, 12(19), 7836. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197836>
15. Pihkala, P. (2022). Toward a taxonomy of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety. *Sustainability*, 14(4), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14042196>
16. Searle, K., & Gow, K. (2016). Do concerns about climate change lead to distress? *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*, 8(2), 230–246. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17568691011089891>
17. Soutar, C., & Wand, A. P. F. (2022). Understanding the spectrum of anxiety responses to climate change: A systematic review. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 6(7), e607–e616. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(22\)00113-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(22)00113-1)
18. Stanley, S. K., Hogg, T. L., Leviston, Z., & Walker, I. (2021). From anger to action: Differential impacts of eco-anxiety, eco-depression, and eco-anger on climate action and wellbeing. *Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 1, 100003. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2021.100003>

19. Taylor, S. E., Klein, L. C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R. A. R., & Updegraff, J. A. (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight. *Psychological Review*, 107(3), 411–429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.107.3.411>
20. Taylor, S. E. (2012). Social support: A review. In H. S. Friedman (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of health psychology* (pp. 189–214). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195342819.013.0009>
21. Verplanken, B., Marks, E., & Dobromir, A. I. (2020). On the nature of eco-anxiety: How constructive or unconstructive is habitual worry about global warming? *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 72, 101528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101528>
22. Wullenkord, M. C., et al. (2021). Anxiety and climate change: A validation of the climate anxiety scale in Germany. *Climatic Change*, 168, Article 46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03234-6>