

Climate anxiety and workforce wellbeing: HR's role in sustainable resilience

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Abstract

Climate change is increasingly recognized as not only an environmental crisis but also a psychological and organizational challenge. A growing number of employees are experiencing “climate anxiety,” characterized by stress, uncertainty, and fear about the future. This anxiety directly impacts workforce wellbeing, influencing productivity, engagement, and long-term organizational performance. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in addressing climate anxiety and fostering sustainable resilience among employees. Through a review of existing literature and conceptual analysis, this research highlights how HR can integrate mental health initiatives, green workplace practices, and resilience-building strategies into organizational policies. The study emphasizes that HR's proactive role in managing climate anxiety is critical to sustaining both employee wellbeing and organizational effectiveness in a rapidly changing global environment.

Keywords: *Climate anxiety, workforce wellbeing, Human Resource Management, sustainable resilience, green HRM, mental health, employee engagement*

Introduction

The accelerating realities of climate change are no longer confined to scientific debates or environmental advocacy—they have become a pervasive force shaping the psychological and operational dimensions of today's workplaces. As climate anxiety, or eco-anxiety, emerges as a widespread response among employees, organizations are increasingly compelled to confront its implications for workforce wellbeing, productivity, and long-term sustainability. Recent workforce surveys reveal that nearly one third of employees are either directly exposed to climate-related workplace risks or express significant concern for their health and future in this changing environment. This mounting anxiety, characterized by persistent stress, fear, and uncertainty about the future, extends beyond individual mental health, presenting urgent challenges for overall organizational resilience and effectiveness. Yet, it also presents a critical opportunity: Human Resource Management

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(HRM) can play a transformative role in translating climate-related concerns into proactive strategies for employee support and sustainable organizational adaptation. By integrating mental health initiatives, green workplace practices, and resilience-building programs, HR leaders have the potential not only to mitigate the adverse effects of climate anxiety, but also to cultivate a workplace culture rooted in wellbeing, environmental responsibility, and adaptive strength.

This study explores the complex interface between climate anxiety and workforce wellbeing, emphasizing HR's strategic role in fostering sustainable resilience for employees and organizations alike.

Importance Of Climate Anxiety and Workforce Wellbeing

Recognizes climate anxiety as a workplace issue, showing how environmental concerns directly affect employees' mental wellbeing, stress levels, and emotional stability.

Highlights its impact on organizational performance, including reduced productivity, lower motivation, difficulty concentrating, and increased burnout.

Emphasizes HR's strategic responsibility in addressing climate-related stress through mental health support, flexible policies, and resilience-building initiatives.

Shows employees' growing expectation for sustainable practices, reinforcing the link between environmental responsibility and workplace morale.

Supports long-term organizational resilience, demonstrating how integrating wellbeing and sustainability strengthens engagement, retention, and a sense of shared purpose.

Contributes valuable academic and practical insights for designing climate-aware HR policies and creating healthier, future-ready workplaces.

Advantages of Climate Anxiety and Workforce Wellbeing

Raises awareness of an emerging issue by highlighting climate anxiety as a legitimate workplace mental health concern.

Provides data-driven insights, using both primary and secondary sources to understand how climate anxiety affects productivity, wellbeing, and engagement.

Strengthens HR's strategic role, offering practical recommendations for mental health programs, sustainability initiatives, and resilience-building.

Reflects diverse workforce perceptions through responses collected from employees across multiple sectors and roles.

Connects wellbeing with sustainability, helping organizations design policies that address both environmental responsibility and employee needs.

Contributes to academic literature, filling gaps in research on climate change, mental health, and organizational behavior.

Disadvantages Of Climate Anxiety and Workforce Wellbeing

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Limited sample size (48 respondents), which may not fully represent wider workforce patterns or diverse industries.

Convenience/purposive sampling may introduce bias, as the participants may share similar backgrounds or awareness levels.

Self-reported data, which can be influenced by personal perception rather than measurable behavioral changes.

Lack of longitudinal analysis, meaning it does not track how climate anxiety changes over time or during extreme climate events.

Limited generalizability, as findings may not apply equally to all countries, industries, or organizational structures.

Does not deeply examine organizational policy implementation, focusing more on perceptions than on actual HR outcomes or sustainability metrics.

Objectives

To analyze the psychological and organizational impacts of climate anxiety on employees and overall workforce wellbeing.

To assess how climate anxiety influences key organizational outcomes such as productivity, engagement, job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover.

To explore the critical role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in recognizing and addressing climate anxiety through targeted mental health and sustainability initiatives.

Review of Literature

Climate anxiety, or the chronic fear of environmental doom, is an emerging psychological issue, particularly for working populations. According to Clayton (2020) and Pihkala (2022), climate anxiety can no longer be solely related to environmental activists but has become a growing concern for employees in various sectors due to the increase in ecological disruptions, extreme weather conditions, and demands for sustainability. It evokes stress responses, uncertainty about the future, and emotional exhaustion that influences wellbeing in the workplace.

Further research shows that climate-related stress may impact organizational outcomes. For instance, a study by Ogunbode et al. (2021) reveals that workers who experience anxiety related to climate change tend to report strained productivity, an inability to concentrate, and lower job satisfaction. In addition, there is empirical evidence that distressed conditions related to climate change can be associated with burnout since one feels overburdened both by the ecological threat outside and by the internal urge to perform well under uncertainty. These can also lead to higher turnover intentions, with younger workers attaching high importance to sustainability and expecting organizations to assume moral responsibility for environmental action.

Over the last couple of years, Human Resource Management has come to the fore as one of the principal players in dealing with climate-induced stress. The literature on sustainable HRM expresses the importance of combining environmental responsibility with employee well-being. Researchers discuss three important roles taken on by HR: first, the development of psychological safety by way of climate communication and support; second, the development of employee resilience through mental health interventions; and third, embedding sustainability within organizational culture to ensure there is a collective purpose. Indeed, studies show that when employees feel their organizations are taking

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care of the environment, they express more engagement, better organizational commitment, and lower levels of anxiety.

In general, the literature positions climate anxiety both as a psychological and organizational challenge, at the same time highlighting HRM as a strategic driver for sustainable resilience.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, utilizing both primary and secondary data already compiled and presented in the research paper.

Primary Data: Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire survey administered to employees across different sectors. The dataset includes responses on:

Levels of climate anxiety

Workplace wellbeing indicators (stress, engagement, burnout)

Perceptions of HR support and sustainability practices

A total of 48 respondents participated through convenience/purposive sampling. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean scores) and content analysis for open-ended responses.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was sourced from peer-reviewed journals, environmental psychology literature, HRM studies, and global workforce reports, all of which are integrated in the literature review. Studies by Clayton (2020), Pihkala (2022), Ogunbode et al. (2021), and recent HR sustainability frameworks provided the theoretical basis for interpreting both climate anxiety and HR's role.

Data Analysis

A combined analytical approach was used:

Thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to eco-anxiety, well-being, and HR interventions from both literature and qualitative responses.

Descriptive statistical analysis to assess prevalence, severity, and workplace impact of climate anxiety among employees.

Ethical Considerations: All participants were informed about the academic purpose of the study, responses remained anonymous, and only publicly accessible or scholarly secondary sources were used.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a **mixed-method research design** that integrates both primary and secondary data to explore the relationship between climate anxiety and workforce wellbeing, as well as HR's strategic role in fostering sustainable resilience. The approach is both **descriptive and exploratory**, allowing the research to measure the prevalence and impact of climate anxiety while also uncovering emerging patterns in organizational responses. Primary data included a structured questionnaire administered to employees across various sectors, capturing their levels of climate anxiety, workplace stress, engagement, productivity, and perceptions of organizational and HR support. The responses collected through this survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends, compare experiences across respondents, and assess how climate-related distress influences wellbeing and work performance. Open-ended responses further contributed qualitative insights into personal experiences, coping strategies, and employee expectations, strengthening the depth of analysis.

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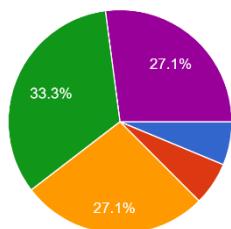
Complementing the primary data, the study also draws extensively on **secondary sources**, including peer-reviewed journal articles, environmental psychology research, HRM literature, and global organizational reports related to climate anxiety and workplace wellbeing. These sources-such as the works of Clayton (2020), Pihkala (2022), and Ogun bode et al. (2021)-provided the theoretical framework necessary to interpret primary findings and contextualize them within broader global trends. A **convergent mixed-method approach** was used, where both data streams were analyzed separately and then integrated to create a holistic understanding of how climate anxiety manifests in the workforce and how HR can intervene effectively. This design enables the study to triangulate employee experiences with established academic evidence, ensuring a comprehensive and credible analysis of the psychological, organizational, and strategic HR dimensions of climate anxiety.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis and interpretation of this research draw on responses from 48 participants, complemented by insights from relevant secondary literature. Descriptive statistical analysis of the primary data revealed varying levels of climate anxiety among employees, with noticeable effects on productivity, emotional wellbeing, concentration, and overall engagement at work. These patterns helped establish a clear link between climate-related stress and key organizational outcomes. When interpreted alongside existing studies on eco-anxiety and sustainable HRM, the findings show strong alignment with global research, explaining both the psychological roots of climate anxiety and its workplace implications. Together, the combined data indicate that climate anxiety is not only an individual mental health concern but also a significant organizational challenge, reinforcing the need for proactive HR initiatives that support employee wellbeing and strengthen sustainable resilience within the workplace.

INTERPRETATION

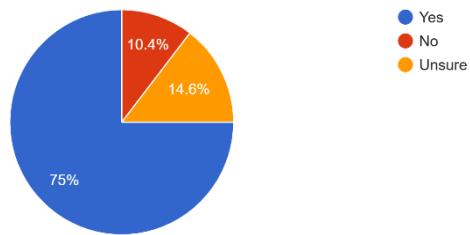
Fig:1. Public Concern Regarding Climate Change Impact



This pie chart illustrates the distribution of responses from 48 participants to the question: "How concerned are you about the impact of climate change on your future?" The concern level was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is "Not Concerned" and 5 is "Extremely concerned." The data shows a high level of concern, with the highest single percentage (33.3%) reporting a concern level of 4, and the second-highest percentage (27.1%) reporting the maximum concern level of 5.

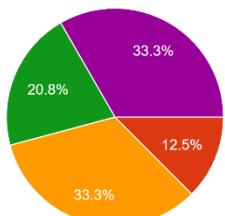
Fig:2. Perceived Direct Impact of Climate Change on Mental Wellbeing

This pie chart displays the results of a survey question asking 48 participants if they believe climate change directly affects their mental wellbeing. A large majority of respondents (75%) answered "Yes", indicating a strong perceived link between environmental concerns and mental health. Only 10.4% of participants responded "No", while 14.6% were "Unsure".



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Fig: 3. Organizational Responsibility for Climate Anxiety



This chart shows how participants view an organization's responsibility in addressing employees' climate-related anxieties, using a scale from 1 (not responsible) to 5 (highly responsible). The most common responses were 3 and 5, each chosen by 33.3% of participants. Overall, 54.1% selected the top two ratings (4 or 5), indicating a clear expectation that organizations should play a significant role in supporting employees facing climate-related concerns.

Fig:4. Frequency of Climate-Related Stress or Worry Among Participants

The pie chart illustrates how often the 48 respondents experience stress or worry related to climate change. The largest group, 45.8%, reported feeling this worry *sometimes*, followed by 33.3% who experience it *often*. Meanwhile, 16.7% feel it *rarely*, and a small proportion *always* experience climate-related worry. These results suggest that a majority of participants encounter climate stress at least occasionally, with a significant share experiencing it frequently.

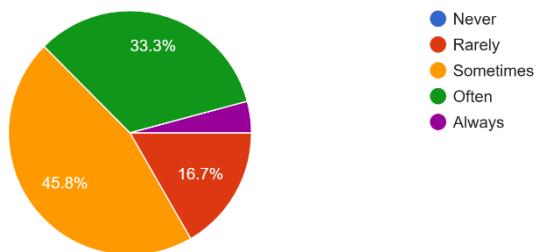
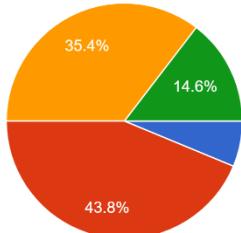


Fig:5. Impact of Climate-Related Concerns on Work Performance

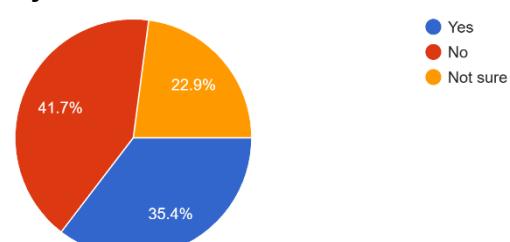


● Not at all
● Slightly
● Moderately
● Significantly

This pie chart shows how 48 respondents perceive the impact of climate-related issues on their work performance, including focus, motivation, and productivity. The largest group, 43.8%, reported being moderately affected, while 35.4% said they were slightly affected. Additionally, 14.6% experienced a significant impact, and only a small portion indicated that climate concerns had no effect at all. Overall, the results suggest that climate-related stress influences work performance for a majority of participants, with many experiencing moderate to substantial effects.

Fig: 6. Availability of Organizational Support for Climate-Related Mental Health

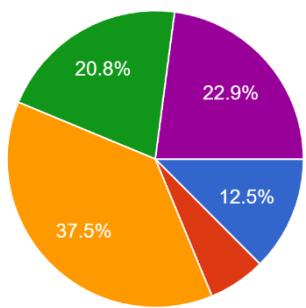
The pie chart reflects how 48 respondents perceive the availability of mental health resources or programs in their organization specifically addressing climate anxiety. A significant portion, 41.7%, reported that their organization does not provide such support, while 35.4% indicated that resources are available. Additionally, 22.9% were not sure, suggesting limited awareness or communication about existing programs. Overall, the results show that many employees either lack access to or are unaware of organizational support for climate-related mental health concerns.



● Yes
● No
● Not sure

Fig: 7. Perceived Effectiveness of HR in Addressing Climate Anxiety at Work

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1 The pie chart shows how 48 respondents rate HR's effectiveness in managing climate-related anxiety in the workplace on a scale from 1 (not effective) to 5 (highly effective). The largest share, 37.5%, selected a rating of 3, suggesting moderate confidence in HR's role. Additionally, 22.9% rated HR as highly effective (5), and 20.8% chose 4, indicating that a significant portion sees strong potential in HR involvement. Smaller groups rated HR as minimally effective, with 12.5% choosing 1 and 6.3% choosing 2. Overall, the responses reflect a generally positive belief in HR's ability to address climate anxiety, with many leaning toward moderate to high effectiveness.

Fig: 8. Frequency of Worry About the Effects of Climate Change

This pie chart illustrates how often the 48 respondents worry about the effects of climate change on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The largest group, 33.3%, selected a rating of 3, indicating moderate, occasional worry. Another 27.1% rated their worry at level 4, showing frequent concern. Meanwhile, 14.6% chose both 2 and 5, representing those who worry rarely and those who worry consistently. A smaller portion, 10.4%, reported never experiencing such worry. Overall, the results show that most respondents experience climate-related worry to some degree, with many feeling it regularly.

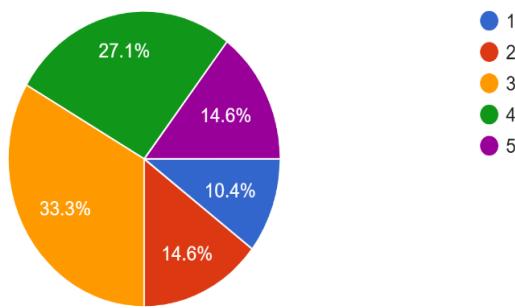
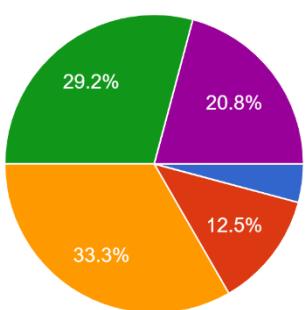


Fig: 9. Impact of Climate Anxiety on Workplace Focus



1 This pie chart shows how 48 respondents rate the degree to which climate anxiety affects their ability to focus at work, using a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The most common response, chosen by 33.3%, was 3, indicating a moderate impact. Another 29.2% rated the impact at level 4, suggesting frequent difficulty concentrating due to climate-related worries. Additionally, 20.8% selected 5, showing that a notable portion experiences consistent, significant impact. Smaller groups reported little to no effect, with 12.5% choosing 2 and only 4.2% selecting 1. Overall, the results highlight that climate anxiety affects focus at work for a majority of respondents, with many experiencing moderate to high levels of disruption.

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Impact of Climate Change on Sense of Wellbeing at Work (Qualitative Insights)

The qualitative responses indicate that climate change influences employees' wellbeing at work in a range of personal and practical ways. Many participants described feeling physically uncomfortable—especially during extreme heat or sudden weather shifts—which often leads to headaches, fatigue, low energy, or difficulty moving around, ultimately making it harder to stay active and focused. Several ISBN code 978-93-83302-80-2

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respondents noted that unusual or unpredictable weather affects their mood, causing irritability, laziness, or a sense of mental disturbance that carries into their workday. A recurring theme was increased stress or anxiety about the future, with some individuals expressing worry, uneasiness, or distraction when thinking about long-term environmental changes and how these might affect their lives. Others highlighted that poor weather—such as continuous rain or gloomy skies—reduces motivation and concentration, while a few mentioned that climate-related discomfort worsens existing health conditions like migraines. Some responses also pointed out that climate change can diminish their sense of purpose or job satisfaction, particularly when they feel their work or workplace is not aligned with sustainable practices. At the same time, a small number of individuals reported little to no impact, noting that their wellbeing remains largely unaffected or depends on day-to-day weather rather than climate change specifically. Overall, the responses show that for many employees, climate change creates a mix of physical strain, emotional tension, and fluctuating motivation, making it a genuine factor shaping their daily sense of wellbeing at work.

Role of HR in Helping Employees Cope with Climate Anxiety (Qualitative Insights)

The qualitative responses highlight that employees expect HR to take an active and supportive role in helping them cope with climate anxiety. Many participants emphasized the importance of **creating a supportive work environment**, where HR acknowledges climate-related stress and encourages open conversations about environmental concerns without judgment. A recurring suggestion was the need for **mental health support**, including counselling services, stress-management sessions, wellbeing programs, and resilience-building workshops that address both emotional and psychological effects of climate anxiety.

Several respondents suggested that HR should organize **awareness campaigns, training sessions, and educational programs** to help employees better understand climate change and its impact on wellbeing. Many also expressed the need for **practical workplace adjustments**, such as flexible working arrangements during extreme weather, considerate attendance policies, and facilities that make employees feel more comfortable during climate fluctuations. Another prominent theme was the expectation that HR should **promote or lead sustainability initiatives**—such as green workplace practices, waste management efforts, and energy-efficient policies—so employees feel their organization is taking meaningful climate action. Overall, the responses show that employees perceive HR's role as both **emotional support provider** and **strategic leader** in creating a climate-aware, resilient, and environmentally responsible workplace.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results from this study demonstrate that climate anxiety is not solely a personal emotional response; it's a workplace issue with real implications for organizational functioning. Employees who are worried about ecological crises bring this concern into their daily work lives, which affects their focus, engagement, and wellbeing in general. When people feel uncertain about the future of the planet, their sense of stability, purpose, and motivation can erode. In turn, this influences productivity, job satisfaction, and even decisions about long-term career choices.

What becomes clear is that climate anxiety serves as both a silent stressor and a catalyst. It can sap energy and feed burnout, yet it may also spur employees to demand greater action from their employers on sustainability. Those organizations that fail to recognize and respond to such emotions will continue to suffer from employee disengagement and attrition—particularly among the younger workforce, for whom environmental responsibility is akin to a core value. Conversely, companies

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sensitive to climate-related distress will help create a more connected sense of belonging and shared purpose.

This is where HR's role becomes pivotal. No other function sits better at the intersection between employee wellbeing and sustainability efforts than HRM. Through the provision of climate-sensible mental health support, designing resilience-building programs, embedding sustainability within training and culture, HR can help create an environment where employees feel supported, not overwhelmed. Transparency in communication about the organizational sustainability goals and environmental initiatives reduces uncertainty and empowers employees.

In essence, climate anxiety is an increasingly prominent factor affecting workforce well-being, one which HR must intervene on proactively. An organization that incorporates mental health support along with sustainable strategies protects employees' well-being while establishing long-term resiliency. This research reinforces that HR's role around climate anxiety is not some optional add-on; it's integral in nurturing emotionally safe, environmentally conscious, and sustainably resilient workplaces.

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Provides measurement tools and evidence for understanding climate anxiety, which can inform HR assessment and support systems.



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