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Eco-Anxiety, Resilience And Meaning In Life Among Young Adults

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Abstract: Climate crisis has given rise to eco-anxiety among people and has a lot of adverse effects on mental health and wellbeing in general. A demonstration of resilience in the face of such environmental difficulties might help manage eco-anxiety and maintain meaning in life. The current study was conducted to study the relationship between eco-anxiety, resilience and meaning in life among young adults. For the study, 150 participants (75 female, 75 male) between the age range of 18-24 years from different colleges of Delhi NCR who responded to the Hogg's Eco-anxiety scale (HEAS-13), Connor Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC) and Meaning in Life questionnaire (MLQ). The results showed that there were no significant gender differences in the levels of eco-anxiety, resilience, and meaning in life among young adults. The results also found that there was a weak negative relationship between eco-anxiety and resilience; no significant correlation between eco-anxiety and meaning in life and a significant positive relationship between resilience and meaning in life among young adults. Regression analysis showed that resilience significantly predicted meaning in life. The study also proposed various possible factors for explanation of the result and ways to deal with eco anxiety, build resilience and maintain meaning in life. The relationship between the variables was discussed.

Key words: Eco-anxiety, resilience, meaning in life, young adults

I. INTRODUCTION

As the world is challenged by various unprecedented ecological crises, individuals can be seen as experiencing what is known as eco-anxiety. These ecological challenges have given rise to feelings of hopelessness, sadness, uneasiness and fear as well as affected the overall wellbeing of people in general. Such feelings arise due to the awareness regarding the irreversible human impact on the overall ecosystem. A demonstration of resilience in the face of such environmental difficulties might help manage eco-anxiety and maintain meaning in life. Eco-anxiety becomes more prevalent in people who face these ecological disasters on a more frequent basis. Eco-anxiety refers to a type of anxiety that is a result of environmental damage. It is characterized by the usual symptoms of anxiety but in an environmental context. APA defines eco-anxiety as "the chronic fear of environmental cataclysm that comes from observing the seemingly irrevocable impact of climate change and the associated concern for one's future and that of next generations." Eco-anxiety is not a diagnosable condition yet, but being a type of anxiety, it does have an equal amount of psychological impact on people. As the carbon emissions, unhealthy environmental practices, deterioration of the resources, and inability of the world leaders to make decisions continue to rise, so does the eco-anxiety among the young adults. Eco-anxiety as a term is relatively new but the concept is well known. The exact origins of the term are unknown but it is believed that it was in the 1990s that it was initially found in academic literature before making its way into popular culture. It was around 2005 when the term "solastalgia" was coined by an Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht. Solastalgia was used to explain the actual emotional distress experienced by people with strong environmental connections. Later, with time and with more prevalent impact of the ecological crises experienced by people, eco-anxiety became more studied in literature although there is still a long way to go to understand the concept. In recent times, more studies and surveys have shed light on the adverse impact of climate crises in children and young adults. Climate change and its impact can be seen almost everywhere now. It is also natural for the climate to change but since quite a few decades it is mostly human activity driven. People are somewhat aware of climate change and the change in overall environment, but they are unable to see it as something urgent or as a life/death situation. One of the main causes of eco-anxiety is climate change, which poses a global threat to both the environment and human well-being. According to research, the effects of climate change, including extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels, can cause emotions of anxiety and despair (Watts et al., 2019). The effect of climate change-related weather events and natural disasters have had a negative impact on our mental health. These occurrences can lead to problems with sleep, stress, anxiety, and depression (Warsini et al. 2014). Eco-anxiety can also cause a sense of helplessness and a loss of purpose, which heightens dejection and disengagement. Additionally, governments and corporations' denial of the effects of climate change and their lack of action can exacerbate feelings of helplessness and despair. (Clayton et al. 2017)

Resilience on the other hand, refers to the ability of a person to bounce back to their original form in the face of adversity. Resilience is about human adaptation and recovery when challenged with a difficult situation. Difficulties are a part of life, but they relate to how well a person is able to make it through those difficulties by coping with them in an efficient way. In simpler terms, people are seen as being resilient if they don't develop any problems after experiencing difficulties in life. Resilience is studied so that appropriate interventions are developed to equip people with positive adaptation strategies through the adversities of life. Some characteristics of resilient people include regulation of emotions, having an internal locus of control, the ability to regulate oneself, having a perspective and a problem-solving attitude, not being easily discouraged by the difficulty of the situation, and being aware of their coping resources. People who are skilled in resilience are better able to overcome hardships and difficulties in comparison to those who might resort to unhealthy coping behaviours. Resilience is studied so that appropriate interventions are developed to equip people with positive adaptation strategies through the adversities of life. Some characteristics of resilient people include regulation of emotions, having an internal locus of control, the ability to regulate oneself, having a perspective and a problem-solving attitude, not being easily discouraged by the difficulty of the situation, and being aware of their coping resources. People who are skilled in resilience are better able to overcome hardships and difficulties in comparison to those who might resort to unhealthy coping behaviours. When it comes to factors associated with resilience, two concepts come into play: protective factors and risk factors. The former refers to factors that help individuals overcome challenging situations, while the latter refers to factors that increase the likelihood of unhealthy adaptation to stressors. Every person has a set of traits or qualities that give them a perspective on a situation. These can be innate or acquired. Protective personal factors can include an internal locus of control, awareness of resources, realistic interpretation of life events, healthy close relationships, optimism, agreeableness, hope, extraversion, etc. Active coping, a positive self-image, attachment with members of society, intellectual capacity and functioning, regulation of emotions, and adjustment can be seen as important factors. On the other hand, the opposite of the above-mentioned personal traits can be risk factors and reduce resilience. Resilience is developed and modulated in an integrated manner by a number of interconnected factors, including neurochemicals, genetics, the developmental environment, epigenetics, and neural circuitry. Resilience is also affected by the synthesis and reuptake of neurotransmitters and the functioning of receptors (Curtis & Nelson, 2003). Family factors such as parenting skills, relationships within the family, communication style, social support, attachment style (secure), parental supervision, conflict resolution, socialization, and defined roles have a role to play in building wellbeing and resilience. Being in an overall healthy community is essential to resilience, as it provides good education, exposure to essential opportunities, culture, religion, and connections with peers, as opposed to being part of a community with limited resources, opportunities, and exposure to violence. Community programmes and resources can help young people find strong role models and make connections. Tracing these factors might explain why some young adults are more resilient than others. Young adults with resilience are better able to deal with the stresses of school and work, new social and emotional experiences, and interpersonal relationships. Resilient young adults are better able to deal with the stresses of adulthood, persevere through setbacks, and develop a sense of mastery and control over their lives. Additionally, a variety of positive outcomes for young adults are linked to resilience.

Various philosophers, thinkers, and psychologists have tried to study the concept of meaning in life. The human mind wishes to find meaning in everything, and people have always tried to understand the world around them. Meaning in life can be defined as the importance and purpose of one's life and their existence. Meaning in life is a subjective concept that varies from person to person. While some people find meaning in their work, relationships, or creative pursuits, others find it in spiritual or religious practices, personal development, or helping a cause that is bigger than themselves. The quest for the meaning of life is in many cases driven by a longing to figure out one's position on the planet and to discover a sense of direction or heading. It can include considering one's qualities and convictions and the need to acquire a more profound comprehension of things that truly matter. Individual qualities and values are the standards and convictions that guide an individual's way of behaving and decision making. People are more likely to engage in activities and pursue goals that are in line with their personal values when they have a clear understanding of those values. This alignment can help people feel like their actions are meaningful and have a positive impact, as well as give them a sense of purpose and direction in life. Strong social support networks are associated with higher levels of life meaning. Young adults are particularly interested in the idea of meaning in life because this is a time when people frequently investigate their values, objectives, and sense of purpose. They often look into their own identities and try to figure out who they are and what they want to do with their lives. Young adults can develop a clearer sense of their values, goals, and purpose with the assistance of a sense of meaning in life, which can in turn influence the formation of their identities.

Rationale of the study

There is an overall growing concern towards the depletion of the environment. All ages can experience eco anxiety, but young adults who have grown up with heightened knowledge of environmental deterioration and climate change are more likely to experience it than other age groups. Many young adults experience a sense of hopelessness about the status of the world and their chances for the future, which can cause them to feel helpless, angry, and anxious. There is a dearth of studies on understanding eco-anxiety with its relationship to resilience and meaning in life among young adults. In general, the purpose is to add to the growing body of knowledge about eco-anxiety, resilience, and life's meaning and to shed light on how individuals can improve their well-being in the face of environmental stressors.

Literature review

Young people's mental health is most impacted due to climate crises and are most vulnerable to its effects in Australia (Gunasiri et al., 2022). Climate change is a major stressor that has negative effects like hopelessness, stress, worry and inability to voice. Social media plays the role of a mediating factor. People indulging in climate action showed a positive feeling. Panu (2020) described that eco anxiety consists of existential and practical anxiety. Individuals have concern for the environment which leads to a sense of unease regarding their existence. Also, it can cause problem solving behaviours in people. It is obvious that these worldwide concerns about environmental crises are not about to end anytime soon and hence management of the emotional aspects related to it need to be catered. So, it becomes important to build resilience and adaptive skills to live with these anxieties and distress. Importance is given to both engagement in pro environment action as well as processing of the distressing emotions as a result of eco anxiety. Existential and emotional resilience are the sub aspects of resilience. Processing of emotions that arise as a result of

eco anxiety can be processed during individual or group therapy and also depends on the self-work and skills of the practitioner (Baudon & Jachens, 2021). Children and adults experience various direct and indirect effects of climate change and it also has a significant impact on their overall mental wellbeing (Gislason et al., 2021). Social location also has a role to play when it comes to worry related to eco anxiety. Passmore et al., (2022) highlighted the role of eco anxiety in creating existential fears among people, making people question their identity and meaning due to decline of biodiversity around them. The destruction of the natural habitat of people has led to diminished meaning that they derive from life. Hence, fear of human extinction mounts up, creating a sense of compromised autonomy and fuels anxiety among people. Children and young people are the most impacted sections due to the environment crisis, making them more susceptible to eco anxiety. Governmental responses to climate change are seen as inadequate, and children and youth report a feeling more betrayed than reassured (Hickman et al., 2021).

Objectives:

1. To study the significance of the gender difference between the levels of Eco anxiety, Resilience and Meaning in life among young adults (m=75, f=75).
2. To study the relationship between eco anxiety and resilience among young adults.
3. To study the relationship between eco anxiety and meaning in life among young adults.
4. To study the relationship between resilience and meaning in life among young adults.
5. To study whether meaning in life will be predicted by eco-anxiety and resilience among young adults.

Hypothesis:
H1: There will be significant gender differences in the level of eco-anxiety, resilience, and meaning in life among young adults.
H2: There will be a significant negative relationship between eco-anxiety and resilience among young adults.
H3: There will be a significant negative relationship between eco-anxiety and meaning in life among young adults.
H4: There will be a significant positive relationship between resilience and meaning in life among young adults.
H5: Meaning in life will be predicted by eco-anxiety and resilience among young adults.

Independent variable- Eco-anxiety, Resilience
Dependent Variable- Meaning in life

Method

Sample:
The target sample for this study consisted of young adults, and the aim was to measure their levels of eco-anxiety, resilience, and meaning in life. The sample for this study consisted of 150 participants (75 female, 75 male) between the age range of 18-24 years from different colleges of Delhi NCR. The selection of sample was done using purposive sampling. This method of sampling was used to select participants based on certain specific criteria.

Tools:

1. Hogg's Eco-anxiety scale (HEAS-13)- Developed by Teaghan L. Hogg (2021), Hogg's eco-anxiety scale is a 13-item self-report scale to measure eco anxiety. The participants respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0- Not at all; 1- Rarely; 2- Sometimes; 3- Often. Scoring can be done by adding up all 13 items' responses to get the total score, which can range from 0 to 39. It has very high internal reliability (>.82 for all subscales) and Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.92, p 0.001.
2. Connor Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC)- Developed by Kathryn M Connor and Jonathan R T Davidson in 2003, the Connor Davidson resilience scale is a self-reporting measure of resilience. The scale consists of 25 items and each item follows a five-point Likert scale format ranging from not true at all; rarely true; sometimes true; often true; true nearly all of the times. The scale was found to have internal consistency of 0.89 and test-retest reliability of 0.87, respectively.
3. Meaning in Life questionnaire (MLQ): Developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006), meaning in life questionnaire is a 10-item self-rating scale designed to measure meaning in life of the individuals. Participants are asked to rate themselves on a 7-point Likert scale starting from 1-Absolutely Untrue; 2-Mostly Untrue; 3-Somewhat Untrue; 4-Can't Say True or False; 5-Somewhat True; 6-Mostly True; and 7-Absolutely True. It measures two aspects of meaning in life: 1) Presence of Meaning (the degree to which respondents believe their lives have meaning) and (2) Search for Meaning (the degree to which respondents strive to discover meaning and comprehension in their lives). The questionnaire has good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha levels for both sub-scales going from .86 to .88 (Steger et al., 2006). The Cronbach's alpha values were: .896,.867, and.670, respectively, for overall meaning in life, search for meaning in life, and presence of meaning in life. The MLQ had a discriminant validity of.65 when compared to other meaning measures.

Procedure

After the finalization of the research problem and extensive literature review, the sample collection was initiated. Purposive sampling was used. The data was collected from 150 participants (75 female, 75 male) between the age range of 18-24 years from different colleges of Delhi NCR. They were first briefed and instructed about the study and informed consent was taken. Then, through the use of questionnaires for the respective variables, the data was gathered from the participants. The questionnaire measured the participants on eco-anxiety, resilience and meaning in life. Their doubts and queries were cleared and data was collected. Confidentiality was maintained. The data was then analysed and interpreted. Statistical techniques such as t-test (for the investigation of significance of the difference between the mean), Pearson's correlation (to study the association between variables) and regression (for the prediction of independent variable on dependent variable) were applied to the study.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and t-test

	Mean		St. Deviation		t-value	sig
	Female	Male	Female	Male		
Eco-anxiety	11.57	12.68	7.643	8.994	-.812	.418
Resilience	66.44	66.20	16.574	19.392	.081	.935
Meaning in life	43.44	44.25	9.644	10.716	-.489	.626

Table 1 shows mean, standard deviation, t-value and significance of eco anxiety, resilience and meaning in life among young adults.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation

	Eco-anxiety	Resilience	Meaning in life
Eco-anxiety	1	-.172*	-.004**
Resilience	-.172*	1	.392**
Meaning in life	-.004**	.392**	1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows the correlation between eco-anxiety, resilience and meaning in life among young adults (N=150). A weak negative correlation of -.172 is shown between eco-anxiety and resilience among young adults. A weak negative correlation of -.004 has been found between eco anxiety and meaning in life among young adults. A moderately positive correlation of .392 has been found between resilience and meaning in life among young adults.

Table 3: Regression analysis

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	R square change	Std. coefficient beta	F	Sig.
1	.392[a]	.153	.148	.153	.392	26.818	.001[b]

a. Dependent Variable: Meaning in life
b. Predictors: (Constant), resilience

Table 3 shows that meaning in life is significantly (15.3%) predicted by resilience.

Discussion

As the world and its people move ahead with time, new challenges present themselves. One such most relevant threat of our times is that of the environmental crisis, which brings with it feelings of uncertainty and eco-anxiety. Eco-anxiety is the anxiety as a result of environmental degradation. The psychological distress and anxiety as a result of the climate crisis affect those most who are more exposed to the harsh side of it. In such difficult times, it becomes necessary to have resources which can help deal with these feelings. The role of resilience becomes necessary here, as it can help people to cope as well as indulge themselves by taking climate action. Meaning in life refers to a person's attribution and subjective perspective towards their own significance and purpose in relation to the overall aspects of life. This eco-anxiety as a result of the potential threat to the purpose and significance of life can also raise the question of the meaning in life, especially among young adults.

Hence, the study was conducted to examine the relationship between eco anxiety, resilience and meaning in life among young adults due to paucity of research in this area. The study findings suggested that there were no significant gender differences in the levels of eco-anxiety, resilience, and meaning in life among young adults (Table 1). Thus, H1 is rejected. This indicates that the constructs may be experienced almost equally by males and females in the current study.

Table 2 shows that Eco-anxiety was found to be significantly related to resilience at a significance level of 0.05 with a mild negative correlation of -.172. Therefore, H2 was accepted. This indicated that individuals who scored high on eco-anxiety tended to report low levels of resilience, and vice versa. This relationship can be explained by the possibility that individuals who are more anxious about environmental issues may be more likely to undergo experiences of adversity and stress in life, making it difficult for them to maintain a sense of resilience in their lives. The negative relationship between eco-anxiety and resilience is not a strong one, and hence other factors might also be important when determining levels of eco-anxiety and resilience in this sample. Table 2 shows no significant correlation was found between eco-anxiety and meaning in life (-.004); therefore, H3 was rejected. This can be explained by the fact that young adults may derive a sense of meaning from factors other than sustainability or environmental concern. These factors could be hobbies, personal growth, meaningful relationships, work, etc., and hence, even though they may experience eco-anxiety, it may not be of a kind to impact their overall meaning in life. Resilience was found to be significantly related to meaning in life at a significance level of 0.01 with a moderately positive correlation of 0.39 (Table 2). Therefore, H4 which states that there is a significant relationship between resilience and meaning in life among young adults was accepted. This can be attributed to the fact that more resilient people are better able to deal with the adversities of life, leading to a sense of control which can contribute towards a sense of meaning in life. The regression analysis was done applying stepwise regression (Table 3). Resilience along with eco-anxiety were entered as independent variables in the equation, where resilience came out as the strongest predictor. The regression table showed that resilience positively predicted approx. 15% of variance (.153) on meaning in life with the beta coefficient of .392. While resilience came out to be the strongest predictor in the analysis, it doesn't indicate that it's the only contributing factor and hence variables not included in the analysis (like social support, spirituality, autonomy etc) may also have a role to play in predicting meaning in life. Hence H5 was accepted. Interventions aimed at educating and guiding young adults with the right resources to deal with eco-anxiety may help them remain resilient. Engagement in eco-friendly activities and behaviours can lead to a sense of responsibility. Interventions aimed at educating and guiding young adults with the right resources to deal with eco-anxiety may help them remain resilient. Engagement and participation in eco-friendly activities and behaviours can lead to a sense of control and help control eco anxiety. Interventions with a focus on building coping skills and resilience can help young adults manage their eco-anxiety and also promote meaning in life. Policymakers could consider such findings to develop environmentally sustainable policies while addressing young adults with eco-anxiety and their mental health concerns. As we move towards taking the environmental crisis more seriously, this study will attempt to provide a basis for future research and an insight into the relationship between eco-anxiety, resilience, and meaning in life among young adults.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to contribute towards the understanding of three variables, namely, eco-anxiety, resilience, and meaning in life. The study provided a correlation between the three variables while exploring how eco anxiety and resilience together help to predict the levels of meaning in life among the study sample. Extensive literature was reviewed to explain the significance of all three variables. Various factors contributing to the result were discussed along with ways to deal with eco anxiety and maintaining resilience and meaning in life. Finally, the study supported 4 out of the 5 hypothesis that were stated.

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