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Is Climate Change Impacting Young Adults' Mental Health?



... and what a survey of almost 16,000 U.S. youth
between the ages of 16 to 25 reveals.



The caveats



I'm data-driven so articles that offer data related to climate change get my attention. That includes a recently released study on climate change's impact on young adults.

The title is a mouthful: *Climate emotions, thoughts, and plans among US adolescents and young adults: a cross-sectional descriptive survey and analysis by political party identification and self-reported exposure to severe weather events*

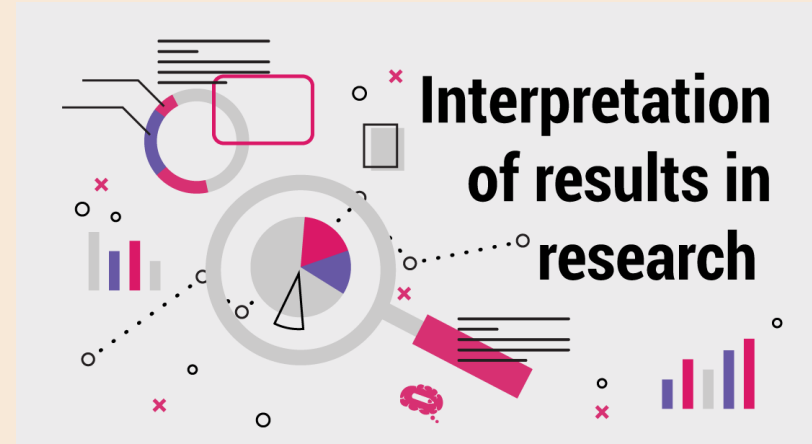
Data - and the subsequent findings - can be easily manipulated if one chooses to. So it's important to always look deeper to understand what, if any biases or manipulations might be present. For this study I offer the following caveats:

- The study was funded by the Avaaz Foundation which, if I were to categorize it, leans left. The study notes that Avaaz had no role in the design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation.
- The findings are based on a self-reporting survey with a non-probability sample. That means the results can't be statistically extrapolated to the overall population.
- The study has been peer-reviewed but I didn't see anywhere by exactly who.
- The word "suggests" is used to describe the findings. Translation: no scientific conclusions can be made, only inferred.

Despite these concerning caveats, the study offers a number of interesting insights.



What the authors claim, and the press reported



The study's interpretation is as follows:

Climate change is causing widespread distress among US youth and affecting their beliefs and plans for the future. These effects may intensify, across the political spectrum, as exposure to climate-related severe weather events increase.

- 85% of respondents are at least moderately worried.
- Almost 60% of respondents are "very or extremely worried".
- Over 40% said that the climate crisis has affected their mental health.
- Three quarters expressed feeling afraid of the future.
- 70% said climate change will impact where they choose to live.
- Over half expressed hesitancy to have children due to climate change.

These results seem quite dire, so how concerned should we be?



It appears to me that both the authors and the press (of course) reported the most “sensational” interpretation of the survey.

Further, it appears to me that the design of the survey biased the responses.

Results seem overstated



Many of the questions included a laundry list of things to consider. This increased the likelihood of an affirmative response. In other words, in my opinion, the survey was designed to achieve a predefined conclusion.

For example:

To the question: How much, if at all, does climate change make you feel the following:

- Anxious, powerless, afraid, sad, angry, despair, ashamed, grief, depressed, guilty, indifferent, optimistic
- If I answered this question, I'd likely check off: angry (at climate change and the survey itself), ashamed (at humankind) and sad, (again for humankind).
- Powerless would be a consideration - and if I were prone to it – despair, although for me disgust would be a more apt description.

Garbage in, garbage out



One more example:

Question: How much, if at all, do your feelings about climate change negatively affect your daily life?

Suggested things to consider included (but were not limited to) the following:

- Your ability to focus on work or school, concentrate, sleep, eat, have fun, and enjoy friendships and relationships.
- Let see, a severe weather event could easily inhibit my ability to have fun.
- Keep this in mind: kids and young adults answered the questions.
- Perhaps they should have asked whether the respondents could separate the anxiety that social media causes them from that of climate change.

Tomorrow I'll highlight some things that I thought were interesting, and potential informative, from the survey.

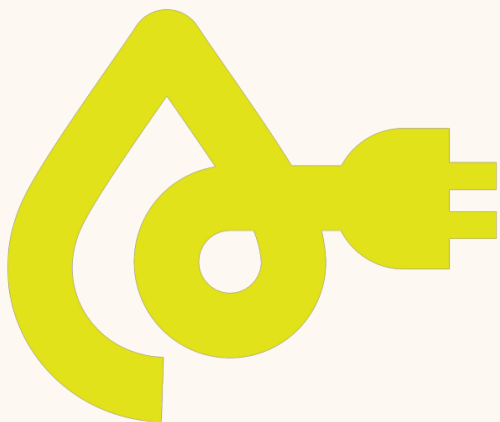
Leading vs. loaded questions

Criteria	Leading Question	Loaded Question
Intent	Guides towards a specific response	Provokes a predetermined answer
Bias	Introduces subtle bias	Imposes evident bias
Example	"Don't you find this feature user-friendly?"	"How amazing is the user-friendliness of this feature?"
Impact on Research	May influence participant responses	Can significantly distort research outcomes

Hopefully you get my drift. I wouldn't put too much credence (if any) in these findings.

The morale of the story:

Reader beware. Propaganda exists on both sides of the argument.



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Unbiased and Unfiltered

- An honest assessment of the climate change effort.
- I cover what's working – but more important - the issues/roadblocks that the industry would prefer to ignore.
- A must-read for anyone with a desire to understand what's really going on with renewable energy and climate change.



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