Environmental anxiety and its impact on the mental health of the individual

Liudmyla Prisniakova, Oleh Aharkov, Iryna Agapova, Olha Aleshchenko

1 Environmental anxiety and its impact on mental health in Ukraine.

Abstract.

In this study, "environmental anxiety" refers to a state of anxiety and tension that arises as a result of concern about the state of the environment and its impact on human health and safety. Psychological distress can be caused by various factors, such as stressful situations, genetic characteristics, neurochemical imbalances, psychological factors, traumatic events, chronic diseases, drug and alcohol use, as well as sociocultural influences. The main forms of environmental anxiety include: fear of environmental problems, disturbing thoughts, concern about possible health effects, hypersensitivity syndrome to environmental factors, anxiety in connection with environmental crises, social anxiety due to environmental aspects, anxiety due to news and media. These forms of anxiety can manifest in different symptoms and manifest at different levels of the personality: physical manifestations, psychological reactions, emotional manifestations, behavioral changes and physiological reactions. The possibility of developing environmental anxiety in the context of environmental issues can be explained by various psychological mechanisms, such as a perceptual filter, catastrophic thinking, a sense of security, social influence, a sense of loss of control and uncertainty, as well as psychosomatic reactions. The publication also provides various psychological approaches and methods aimed at reducing the level of environmental anxiety, such as psychological counseling, cognitive-behavioral therapy, meditation and mindfulness, exposure therapy, stress management, journaling, healthy lifestyle, outdoor recreation, positive perception and understanding of environmental aspects.

1 Environmental anxiety and its impact on mental health in Ukraine.

© The Authors, published by EDP Sciences. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).
2 Scientific discourse on the study of environmental anxiety and its impact on the mental health of an individual.
3 The importance of mental health for general well-being.

- Anxiety and tension
- Psychological factors
- Chronic Traumatic Stressful situations
- Psychological factors
- Financial situations
- Psychological factors
- Social stability and security: An individual's mental health affects social stability and the overall security of society. The absence of mental disorders and anxiety contributes to the reduction of social stigma: some people may perceive individuals with mental disorders differently, leading to discrimination and exclusion. This makes society more supportive and inclusive.
- Psychological factors
- Motivation to achieve their goals. They are usually more productive at work and in school, grateful.
- Psychological factors
- Quality of life: Mental health interacts with physical health and overall well-being. People with good mental health are more likely to enjoy a higher quality of life.
- Productivity and work efficiency: Mentally healthy individuals have more energy and are better able to adapt to changes and challenges.
- Psychological factors
- Understanding the essence of mental health: Mental health is a vital aspect of well-being and affects all aspects of life. It involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects that contribute to overall health and well-being.
- Psychological factors
- Importance of mental health for general well-being: Mental health is an important factor affecting physical health, development, and quality of life. It plays a crucial role in determining one's ability to adapt to stress and difficult situations. Maintaining mental health is essential for personal growth and societal well-being.

4 Psychological factors of psychological anxiety

- Stressful situations. Stress related to events that may be physically, emotionally, or psychologically challenging can contribute to anxiety. Examples include work-related stress, family conflicts, or financial difficulties.
- Psychological factors
- Changes: psychological factors can lead to anxiety. For example, life changes such as job loss, marriage, or retirement can trigger anxiety.
- Psychological factors
- Experience of disasters: traumatic events such as accidents, natural disasters, or war can cause anxiety. These events can lead to long-term psychological effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Psychological factors
- Psychological factors: anxiety can be caused by various factors, including biological, psychological, and social factors. For example, genetic factors, heredity may play an important role in susceptibility to anxiety. If you have a family history of anxiety, you may be at a higher risk of developing anxiety.
- Psychological factors
- Psychological factors: chronic anxiety can lead to physical health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Anxiety can also contribute to mental health problems, such as depression and substance abuse.
Environmental anxiety in people due to threat to life and loss of property. Information about environmental crises, natural disasters (for example, environmental protection, biodiversity), can lead to anxiety because of the threat of changes in everyday life and health effects. Other factors. Other possible causes of environmental anxiety are the lack of effective measures, pollution due to environmental risks such as poisons, etc. The rate of anxiety is 57%. Relatively more often than others, women reported anxiety due to environmental hypersensitivity syndrome (EHS). According to the results of a study conducted among Ukrainians, the overall anxiety due to health disorders, environmental anxiety among the population. In Ukrainian realities, war is one of the main causes of environmental anxiety. Here the increase in military operations due to the occupation of the territory, the destruction of buildings and infrastructure, etc. can cause concern due to concerns about environmental quality and degradation of natural resources.

5 Environmental factors of psychological anxiety.

Forms of anxiety: environmental anxiety due to health threats. Individuals may experience anxiety due to fears for their own health and the health of their loved ones due to environmental risks such as radiation, chemicals, etc. Anxiety due to environmental news and concerns about environmental quality and degradation of natural resources, such as land, water pollution, food poisoning, etc. Reports on future climatic changes. Climate change, such as global warming, sea level rise, biodiversity extinction, biodiversity loss, etc. can cause anxiety expressed in thoughts and various forms of anxiety. Social anxiety due to environmental risk can cause stigmatization, loss of self-esteem, social exclusion, drug use, etc. Use mass media about environmental crises, to talk about social anxiety due to environmental risk. Other possible causes of environmental anxiety are the lack of effective measures, pollution due to environmental risks such as poisons, etc. The rate of anxiety is 57%. Relatively more often than others, women reported anxiety due to environmental hypersensitivity syndrome (EHS). According to the results of a study conducted among Ukrainians, the overall anxiety due to health disorders, environmental anxiety among the population. In Ukrainian realities, war is one of the main causes of environmental anxiety. Here the increase in military operations due to the occupation of the territory, the destruction of buildings and infrastructure, etc. can cause concern due to concerns about environmental quality and degradation of natural resources.

6 Forms of environmental anxiety.

Environmental anxiety in the form of EHS experience, due to environmental risks such as war, contamination, etc. Other possible causes of environmental anxiety are the lack of effective measures, pollution due to environmental risks such as poisons, etc. The rate of anxiety is 57%. Relatively more often than others, women reported anxiety due to environmental hypersensitivity syndrome (EHS). According to the results of a study conducted among Ukrainians, the overall anxiety due to health disorders, environmental anxiety among the population. In Ukrainian realities, war is one of the main causes of environmental anxiety. Here the increase in military operations due to the occupation of the territory, the destruction of buildings and infrastructure, etc. can cause concern due to concerns about environmental quality and degradation of natural resources.
7 Symptoms and manifestations of environmental anxiety in the individual

Symptoms and manifestations of environmental anxiety in the individual

These forms of environmental anxiety can manifest in different symptoms and aspects at the individual level.

1. Physical symptoms:
- Headaches. Individuals may experience tension and pain in the head, including headaches and migraines;
- Muscle tension. Anxiety can cause muscle tension, back and neck pain;
- Tremors. Nervous tension can lead to trembling of the hands or other parts of the body;
- Sleep problems. Individuals may have persistent sleep problems, including restless sleep, more superficial sleep, or insomnia. According to the results of a sociological study among Ukrainians, the average level of self-assessment of physical condition by all respondents is 3.35 points. It was noted that 3% of respondents rated their condition by 1 point, 10% by 2 points, 45% by 3 points, 34% by 4 points, and 8% by 5 points.

2. Psychological symptoms:
- Constant anxiety. Individuals may constantly experience anxiety and fears related to environmental problems;
- Thoughts about certain threats. Focus on environmental threats and fears about the future;
- Problems with concentration. Anxiety can make it difficult to concentrate and make decisions.

3. Emotional manifestations:
- Fear and panic. Environmental anxiety can cause fear and even panic, especially during environmental crises and disasters;
- Irritability and irritation. Individuals may become irritable and irritated more easily due to anxiety;
- Depression and doubts. Environmental anxiety can cause feelings of depression, hopelessness and doubt about the future. Thus, according to the results of a sociological study among Ukrainians, 39% of respondents constantly or often feel lethargic or tired, as well as quick fatigue. 36% of people suffer from disturbed or interrupted sleep, and 35% feel anxiety or fear. Bad mood, excessive anxiety for various reasons, feeling tense or unable to relax, as well as failure to restore strength during rest and excessively early awakening are noted at the level of 31%. Again, 30% of people experience quick irritability or anger, and also have difficulty falling asleep.

4. Behavioral manifestations:
- Avoidance. Individuals may avoid topics and situations related to environmental issues or try to isolate themselves;
- Changes in lifestyle. Anxiety can lead to lifestyle changes, such as changes in diet or social activity.

5. Physiological reactions:
- Increased pulse and pressure. Stress-induced anxiety can lead to increased heart rate and blood pressure;
- Changes in breathing. Rapid and shallow breathing can be a result of anxiety;
- Other physiological reactions. These include sweating, dizziness, and other physical symptoms.

8 Manifestations of environmental anxiety in the context of psychological mechanisms

8 Manifestations of environmental anxiety in the context of psychological mechanisms
9 Impact of environmental anxiety on various aspects of mental health

Physical reactions can lead to poor health, as symptoms of anxiety include increased heart rate, breathing difficulties, and muscle tension. These physical reactions can exacerbate mental health issues such as depression or anxiety disorders. For example, individuals who are exposed to environmental threats may experience anxiety, which can worsen their physical health.

Interactions and social isolation: Environmental anxiety can lead to feelings of isolation and poor social interactions. Individuals may avoid social contact due to anxiety, which can worsen their mental health. For example, anxiety about the environmental threats may lead to social isolation, which can increase depression and anxiety.

Perceptual changes: Environmental anxiety can affect individuals' perception of the environment. They may perceive environmental threats as more frequent and severe than they actually are. This can cause psychological distress and impact their mental health.

Psychosomatic reactions: Environmental anxiety can cause physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, troubled breathing, and heart palpitations. These symptoms can impact daily functioning and lead to poor health outcomes.

Psychological feeling of security. Environmental problems can undermine people's sense of security, leading to anxiety. For example, climate change can lead to environmental threats, causing anxiety and a sense of loss of control. This loss of control can cause anxiety, as individuals may feel that any environmental threat will necessarily lead to the worst consequences, even if information about the actual risk is objectively presented. This catastrophic thinking is a common psychological mechanism of anxiety. Environmental anxiety can therefore affect different aspects of mental health, and this can manifest as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or panic disorder.

Social influence. The social environment also plays an important role in the development of anxiety. If others express anxiety or panic about environmental problems, this can influence individuals who are already prone to anxiety. For example, increased social anxiety can lead to a lack of social support, which can worsen anxiety.

Loss of control and uncertainty. For example, climate change can lead to environmental threats, causing anxiety and a sense of loss of control. This uncertainty and sense of loss of control can cause anxiety, as individuals may feel that any environmental threat will necessarily lead to the worst consequences, even if information about the actual risk is objectively presented. This catastrophic thinking is a common psychological mechanism of anxiety. Environmental anxiety can therefore affect different aspects of mental health, and this can manifest as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or panic disorder.

Environmental anxiety mechanisms. Environmental anxiety can affect different aspects of mental health, and this can manifest as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or panic disorder.

Public education programs and communication that raise awareness of environmental issues can be effective in dealing with environmental anxiety. It is also important to emphasize the need for psychological and medical treatment for anxiety or panic about environmental problems, as they may need professional help to manage their anxiety.
10 The most vulnerable groups in terms of environmental anxiety

Certain groups of individuals may be particularly vulnerable to environmental anxiety due to various physical, psychological, and sociocultural factors. Here are some of these vulnerable groups:

1. Children and teenagers. Children and adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to environmental anxiety because of their immature nervous systems and limited experiences. They may have a harder time understanding and coping with fears and anxieties caused by environmental problems.

2. Persons with mental disorders. Individuals with mental disorders such as anxiety disorders, depression, or PTSD may be more prone to environmental anxiety reactions and may have more difficulty coping with them.

3. Persons with chronic diseases. Individuals with chronic conditions such as asthma, allergies, or other conditions that may be exacerbated by environmental degradation are particularly vulnerable to environmental anxiety.

4. Elderly persons. The elderly may be more vulnerable due to a low level of physical and psychological reserves, as well as a greater risk of health deterioration due to environmental problems.

5. Persons with a low income level. Low-income people may have fewer opportunities to protect themselves from environmental threats, and lack access to clean water and safe shelters.

6. Specialists working in the field of environmental protection. Paradoxically, those who work in the field of environmental protection and study environmental issues may also be vulnerable to environmental anxiety because of their heightened knowledge of the threats and irreversibility of some environmental problems.

These groups of individuals may need special attention and support in reducing the level of environmental anxiety and its consequences for mental health.

11 General recommendations for reducing the level of environmental anxiety.

In this regard, it should be noted that reducing environmental anxiety may require psychological approaches and measures to improve the mental state of a person facing this problem. The following psychological approaches and measures to reduce environmental anxiety can be identified:

1. Psychological consultations. You should contact a psychologist or psychotherapist for an individual consultation. A professional will help you understand the roots of anxiety and develop strategies to overcome it.

2. Cognitive-behavioral therapy. This therapy focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors that contribute to anxiety.

3. Mindfulness and meditation. These practices can help reduce anxiety by promoting relaxation and increasing awareness.

4. Physical activity. Regular exercise can improve mood and reduce anxiety.

5. Social support. Connecting with friends and family can provide emotional support and help reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety.

6. Occupational therapy. This therapy can help individuals develop skills and strategies to cope with anxiety in the workplace.

7. Pharmacological treatment. Medications can be prescribed to help manage anxiety symptoms.

These strategies can help individuals reduce their level of environmental anxiety and improve their mental well-being.
12 Psychological measures to reduce the level of environmental anxiety for different categories of people.
Organize joint activities for senior groups that allow them to interact and support each other.

4. Persons with a low income level:
   - Access to resources. It is necessary to provide these individuals with access to information, resources and programs that will help reduce their environmental anxiety.
   - Community support. It is appropriate to develop programmatic initiatives to support and educate low-income groups.

5. Specialists in the field of environmental protection:
   - Psychological support. It is important to ensure the possibility for specialists to receive psychological support and counseling.
   - Exchange of experience. It is important to create specialized forums for sharing experiences and support.

For each of these categories of persons, it is important to consider their characteristics and needs when developing psychological measures to reduce environmental anxiety.

References
4. D. Duggal, Oxford reveals Word of the Year 2019: Here’s why we should be very, very concerned. The Econ. Tim. Retrieved, April 25 (2022)
7. Emotional and psychological state of Ukrainians uifuture.org/publications/emoczjno-psyhologichnyj-stan-ukrayincziv%EF%BF%BC/ (Last accessed 11.06.2023)