

Abstract for the general public

The global climate crisis currently poses one of the greatest threats to humanity. To reduce the risks and effects of global warming, people need to radically change their approach to the environment. For many people, the awareness of climate change is a source of stress, sadness and anxiety. At the same time, more and more people around the world engage in climate action. However, we still know surprisingly little about our emotional responses to climate change and their impact on pro-environmental behavior. The aim of the project is to fill the gap in knowledge about emotional reactions to climate change, and their impact on mental health and pro-environmental behavior. In our research, we will conduct four studies using questionnaire and experimental methods. The research will be based on data collected in Poland and Norway, two countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels, but with a different approach to environmental protection. In the first study, we will develop a psychological questionnaire to measure climate change worry and the stress caused by its awareness. Using a set of psychological tools regarding, among others general mental state, tendencies to worry and depression, we will try to investigate whether and how worrying about climate change is related to mental health. In the second study, we will try to explain the relationship between emotional responses to climate change, pro-environmental behavior, and factors such as, e.g. beliefs about climate change, climate change worry, and social norms. The study will be based on questionnaire data from a large number of participants from Poland and Norway. To our knowledge, this will be the first such study in Europe. In the third study, we will rely on rigorous methods of experimental psychology to determine how climate change descriptions affect environmental behavior and climate change worry. To this end, we will develop a new set of emotional descriptions of climate change. Such stimuli will aim to evoke one of four emotions: fear, sadness, anger or hope. We will try to determine the effect of different ways of communicating information about the changing climate on people's pro-environmental behavior. The results of this study will allow us to identify the most effective strategies for communicating emotional information on climate change. In the last study, using functional magnetic resonance imaging, we will directly measure the brain's response to emotional descriptions of climate change. By using our set of descriptions from the previous study, we will attempt to understand how the brain responds to emotional information about climate change, and what the relationship is between these reactions and pro-environmental behavior and climate change worry. Such research goes beyond current knowledge and has the potential to influence the understanding of affective-cognitive determinants of pro-environmental behavior. To achieve its goals, the project will rely on interdisciplinary teamwork, combining clinical and environmental psychology with brain imaging techniques. The results of the project will provide a new framework for understanding the emotional perception of climate change and its links with mental health and climate action in the face of the most pressing economic, social and environmental problem of our time.