

# Climate Anxiety Among English-Speaking Youth in Québec





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## **Date published**

**August 2023**

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## INTRODUCTION

As a result of ongoing climate change and disruptions, feelings of climate anxiety have increased in saliency amongst youth globally (Hickman, Caroline, et al. 2021). Climate anxiety, according to *The Handbook of Climate Psychology*, refers to “heightened emotional, mental or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system” (Dodds 2021). Our paper observes the extent to which young (aged 16–30, inclusively) English-speaking Québécois experience this distress in their own lives.

### 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

Little yet has been written on this particular linguistic minority in the context of climate anxiety. Our paper is interested in answering two questions: how widespread is the feeling of climate anxiety amongst Québec’s young English-speakers? Does the total of those familiar with climate anxiety correspond with the number of those who experience it?

### 1.2 OUTLINE

We first summarise the survey responses completed by English-speaking youth spanning the province. We then discuss these survey responses in an attempt to address our two research questions.

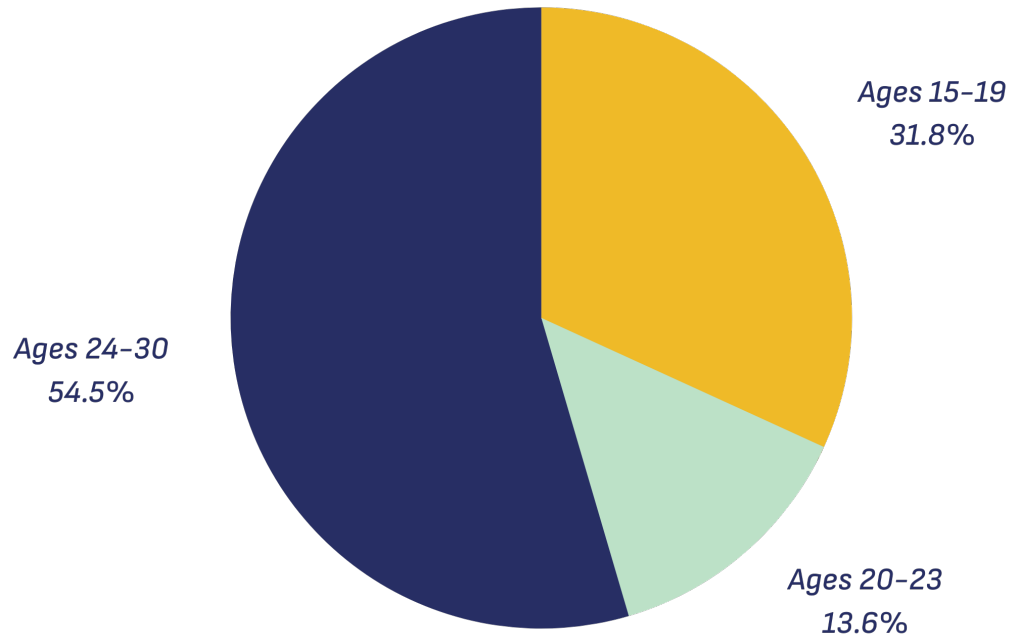
### 1.3 METHODOLOGY

Data to better understand Québec’s English-speaking youth was primarily gathered through a nine question survey. We define youth as being between the ages of 16 and 30, and had participants place themselves within one of three brackets: 15–19, 20–23, and 24–30. Our survey was distributed through Y4Y’s social media accounts and newsletter between May–June 2023 and responded to by 44 English-speaking youth, spread over 12 Québec regions. These regions include Montréal, Gaspé–les–Îles, Saguenay–Lac–Saint–Jean, Côte–Nord, Lanaudière, Montérégie, Centre–du–Québec, Bas–Saint–Laurent, Capitale–Nationale, Outaouais, the Nord–du–Québec, and the Laurentides.

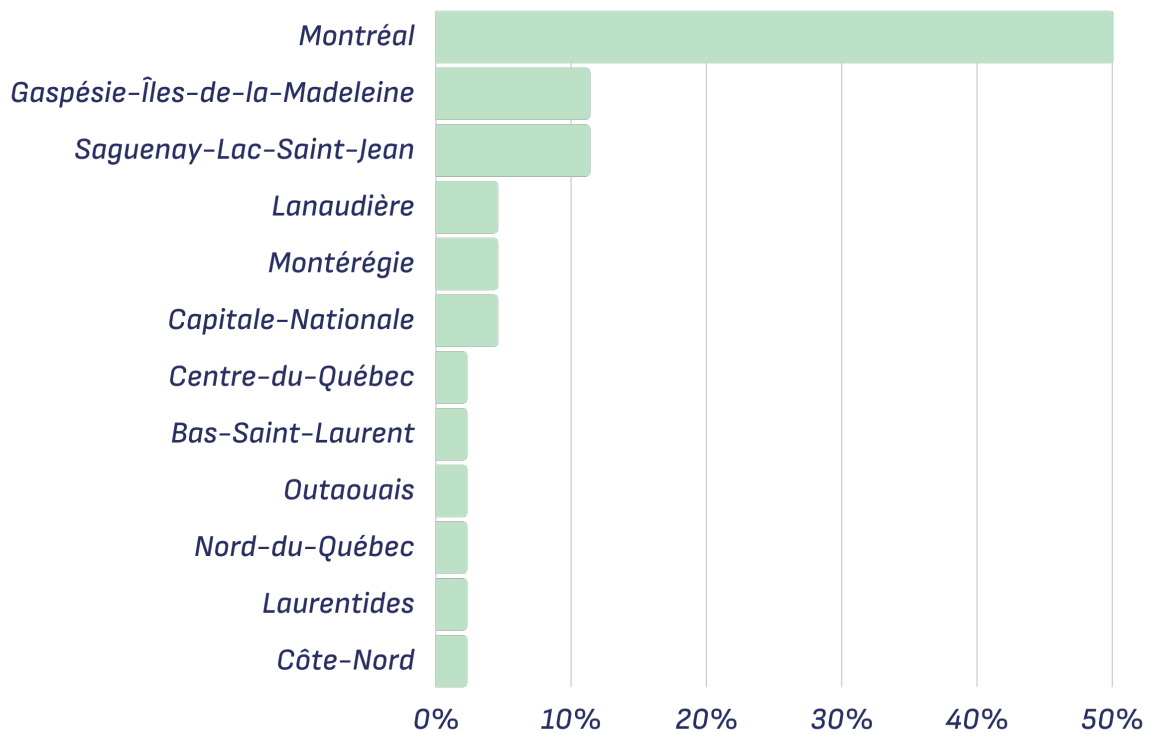
The survey first seeks to create a qualitative portrait of the demographic, including their age and the region in which they reside. The nine questions are indicated in the following section.

Taken together, this primary source commentary is meant to respond to our two main questions: how widespread is the feeling of climate anxiety amongst Québec’s young English-speakers? Does the total of those familiar with climate anxiety correspond with the number of those who experience it?

**Fig.1 - Survey Respondents by Age Group**



**Fig.2 - Survey Respondents by Administrative Region**



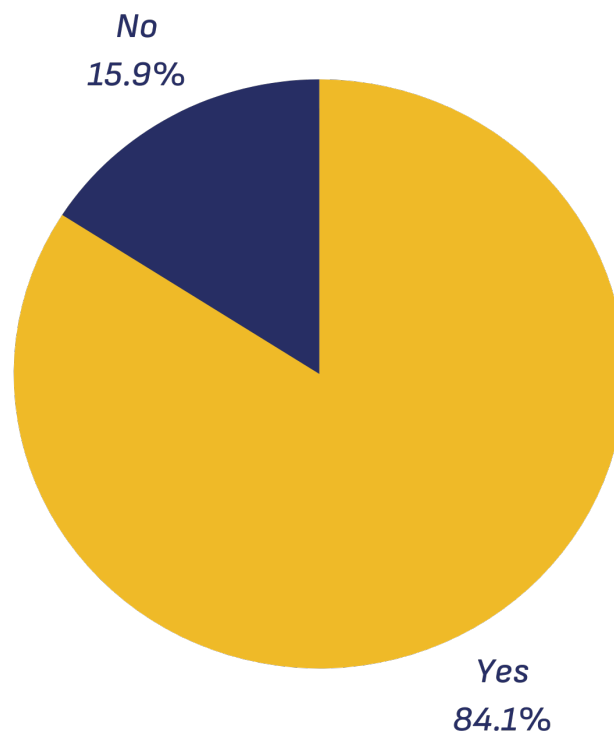
## 2. ANALYSIS

We now turn to the analysis of the questionnaire data we collected as outlined in the methodology section. This analysis will allow us to compare each response with one another and answer our two research questions.

### 1. a) Have you seen or experienced any impacts of climate change around you?

Of our survey respondents, 37 people (84.09%) had seen or experienced climate change impacts, and 7 people (15.91%) have not. The former covers responses from 11 of the 12 surveyed regions, excluding the Nord-du-Québec.

**Fig.3 – Have you seen or experienced any impacts of climate change around you?**



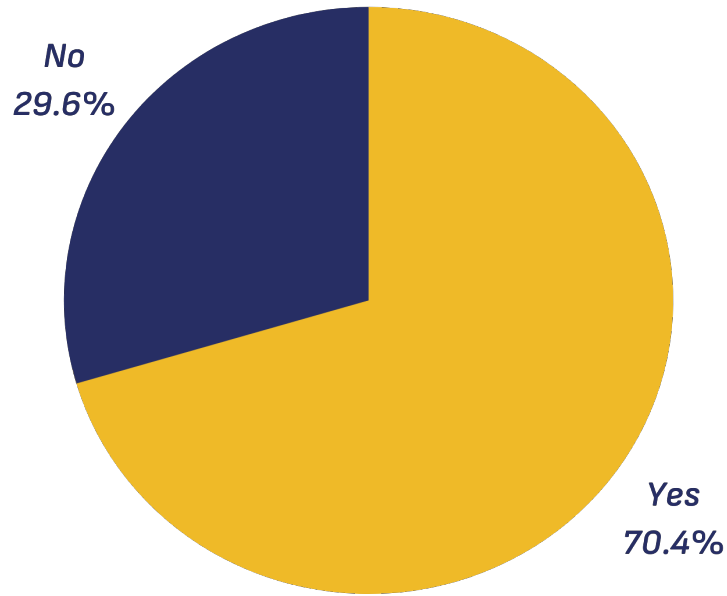
### 1. b) If yes, what are these impacts?

Responses varied widely, however the most frequently cited impacts included “[unpredictable] weather. Major highs and lows of temperature” far outside of the seasonal norm; these lead to “heat waves[,]” “smoke[,]” “forest fires[,]” and “flooding[.]”

### 2. Have you ever heard of climate anxiety?

31 participants (70.45%), over two thirds, had heard of climate anxiety, while 13 participants (29.55%), under a third, had not. The former covers responses from all regions.

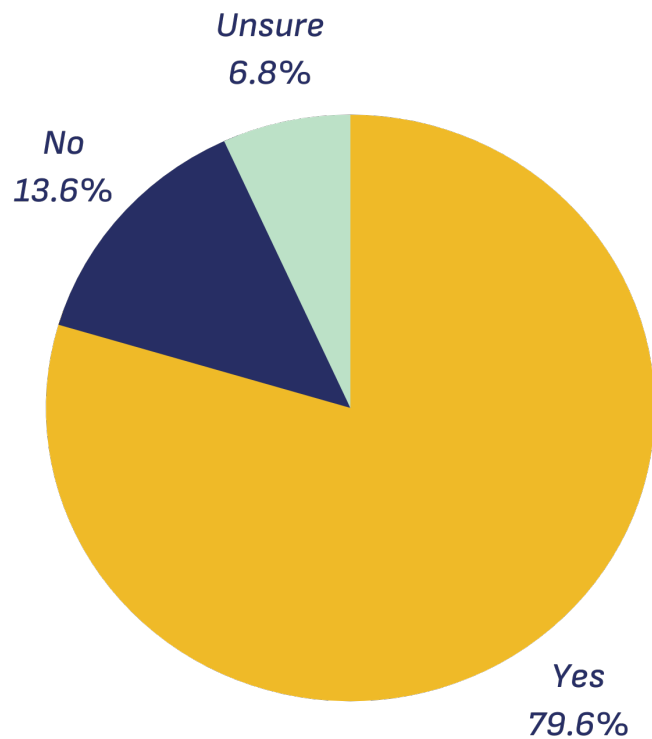
**Fig.4 - Have you ever heard of climate anxiety?**



**3. a) Climate anxiety refers to a “heightened emotional, mental or somatic\* distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system” (Dodds 2021). Have you ever experienced climate anxiety? (\*relating to the body)**

36 participants (81.82%) had experienced climate anxiety, 6 (13.64%) had not, and 2 (4.55%) were unsure.

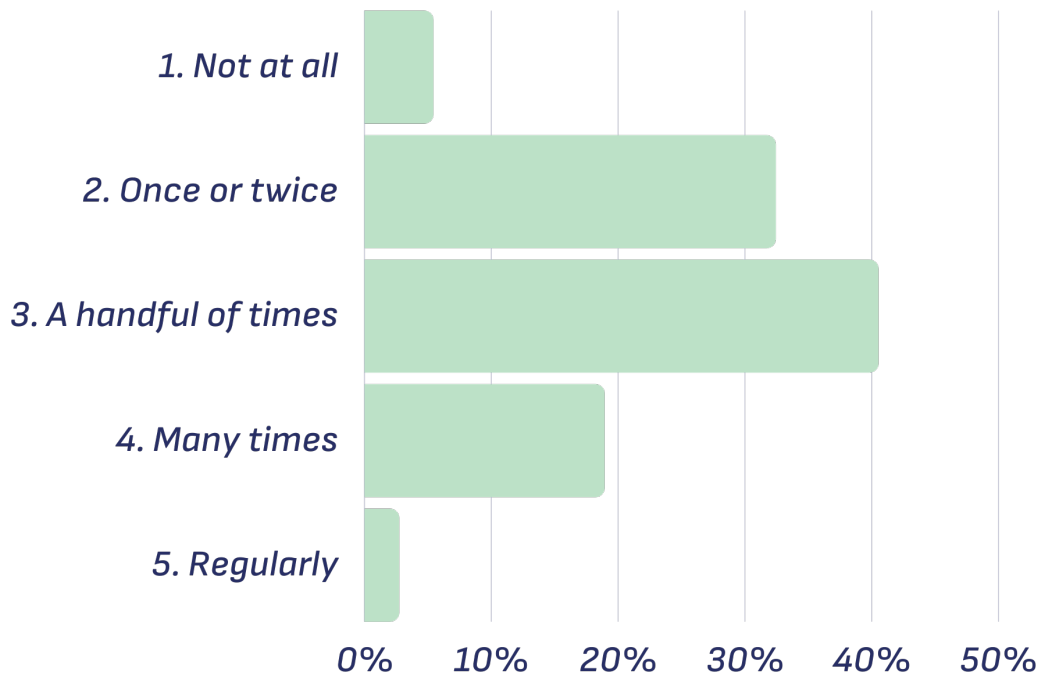
**Fig.5 - Have you ever experienced climate anxiety?**



**3. b) If yes, how frequently have you experienced climate anxiety?**

Our survey offered participants the choice of answering on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 meaning “not at all,” and 5 meaning “regularly[.]” Number 3 was the most frequent response with 15 participants selecting (34.09%), with number 2 in a close second (12 participants at 27.27%). Only one participant selected number 5 (2.27%), and two participants selected number 1 (4.55%).

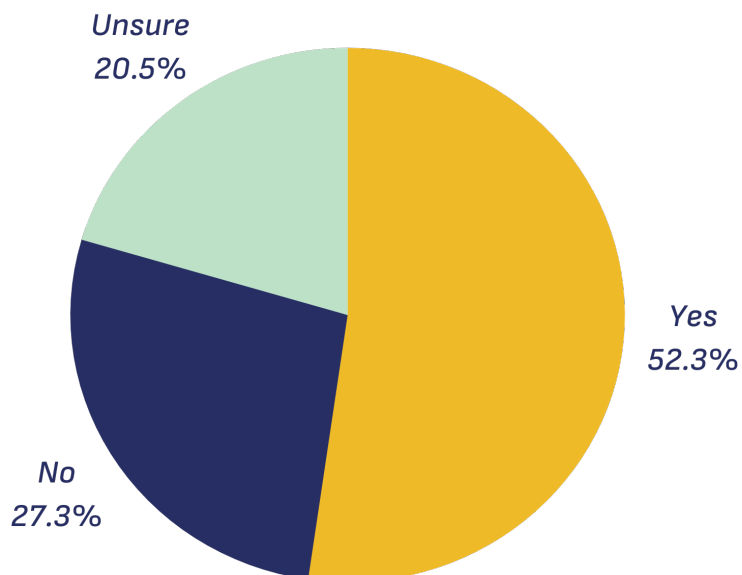
**Fig.6 - How often have you experienced climate anxiety?**



**4. a) If you have experienced climate anxiety, can you identify what has triggered it for you?**

23 participants offered us a trigger response (52.27%), 9 were unsure of the cause (20.45%), and 12 did not (27.27%).

**Fig.7 - If you have experienced climate anxiety, can you identify what has triggered it for you?**





**b) If yes, please tell us about those triggers.**

Triggers were of course varied. Recurring responses included “Watching the news and hearing about natural disasters[;]” “[drastic] weather changes[;]” and “[feeling] hopeless about the future[.]”

**5. a) Are you aware of actions being taken to combat climate change in your region?**

24 participants (54.55%) are aware of certain actions, while 20 participants (45.45%) indicated they were not.

**Fig.8 – Are you aware of actions being taken to combat climate change in your region?**



**5. b) If yes, please tell us about them.**

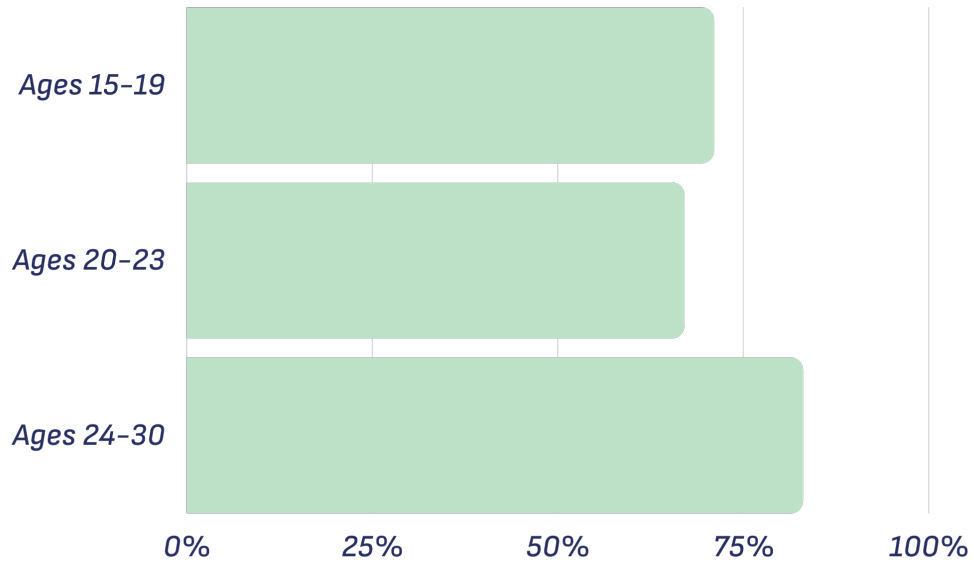
Again, the list of actions given were varied. Those offered tended to be on the smaller scale, including “efforts by large institutions (like McGill) to promote sustainability[;]” “[minimal] efforts like reusable grocery bags[;]” “encouraging of public transport[;]” “Compost[;]” and “[the] ban on plastic bags[.]”

**3. DISCUSSION**

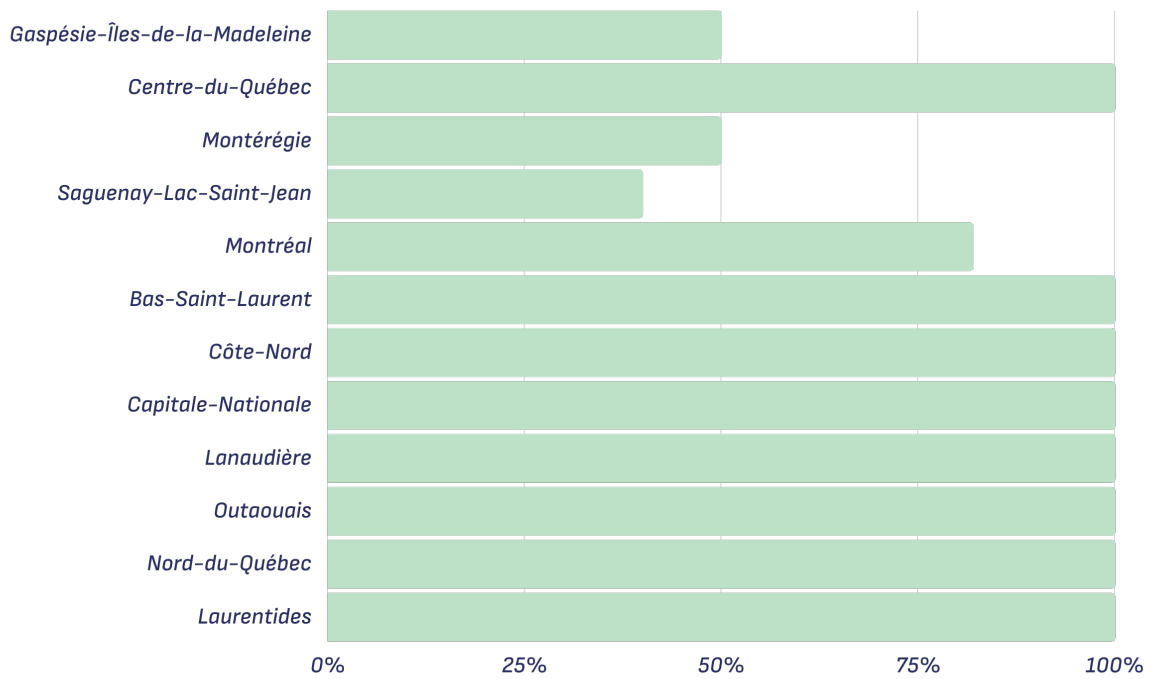
As for our first research question, we found that 79.5% of our participants (35 out of 44), just under four in five, reported experiencing instances of climate anxiety. This covers all 12 administrative regions surveyed, as well as a majority of the youth within each of our survey’s age brackets (15-19, 20-23, and 24-30).

Our research therefore suggests that experiencing climate anxiety is a widespread phenomenon across both age and geographic lines within Québec’s English-speaking youth community.

**Fig.9 – Presence of Climate Anxiety by Age Group**



**Fig.10 – Presence of Climate Anxiety by Region**



As for our second research question, the total number of those familiar with climate anxiety does not correspond with the number of those who experience it. Ten participants (22.73%) answered that while they had not heard of climate anxiety, they went on to state that they had experienced it in their own lives. Twelve participants (27.27%), in total, if we count two who were unaware of the concept, and were then open to having experienced it (“unsure”). These youth in questions are spread between Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean (2), Montréal (6), Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (1), Capitale-Nationale (1), Montérégie (1), and Lanaudière (1). A majority of them (7) are in our lowest of three age brackets, 15 to 19 years old.

Our research therefore suggests that amongst the younger cohort of Y4Y’s definition of youth (15-19), Québec’s English-speaking community is suffering from a form of mental distress they cannot even describe.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since climate anxiety is a widespread phenomenon across Québec’s English-speaking youth community, we recommend that organisations currently serving this population seek climate-specific funding from the provincial and federal governments to increase our understanding of the impacts of climate anxiety, and create programming that addresses them. Since many within the younger cohort of Québec’s English-speaking community are unknowingly suffering from climate anxiety, we recommend the aforementioned funding to prioritise an awareness campaign across the province’s high schools. This is because the promotion of mental health literacy increases the public’s “understanding [of] how to obtain and maintain positive mental health; understanding [of] mental disorders and their treatments; [decreases] stigma related to mental disorders; and, [enhances] help-seeking efficacy (knowing when and where to seek help and developing competencies designed to improve one’s mental health care and self-management capabilities)” (Kutcher et al). We also recommend that a portion of this federal and provincial funding be allocated to mental health-focused organisations to include climate anxiety into their portfolios by engaging eco-therapists, and disseminating coping mechanisms and climate activism opportunities to the wider public.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

This paper sought to answer how widespread the feeling of climate anxiety is amongst Québec’s young English-speakers, and how does exposure to the impacts of climate change affect those feelings, if at all? As for our first research question, our findings imply that experiencing climate anxiety is a widespread phenomenon across both age and geographic lines within Québec’s English-speaking youth community. As for our second research question, our findings imply that amongst the younger cohort of Y4Y’s definition of youth (15-19), Québec’s English-speaking community is suffering from a form of mental distress they cannot even describe.

This paper itself adds value insofar as it provides new data on an often-overlooked linguistic minority in the context of climate anxiety. In order to gather a more representative sample, however, future research ought to consider surveying a larger pool of English-speaking youth. We are

content with helping to have started the conversation. More efforts towards integrating gender and race into the selection of survey respondents should be considered.

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