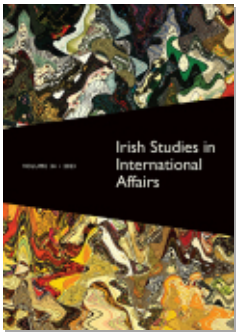
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The Climate Crisis, Climate Anxiety and Children's Rights: A Psychological Perspective on Human Health and Security



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The Climate Crisis, Climate Anxiety and Children's Rights: A Psychological Perspective on Human Health and Security

Michelle Cowley-Cunningham, Alexis Carey and Elaine Rogers

Special Interest Group in Human Rights and Psychology, Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)

ABSTRACT

The climate crisis affects children's well-being and threatens future generations' enjoyment of the right to the highest standard of health and security. This paper discusses a submission by the PSI Special Interest Group in Human Rights and Psychology to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. As health profession stakeholders we highlight how environmental degradation and children's awareness of climate change present an important linkage to children's mental health. We provide a psychological health account of climate anxiety and its effects on children, and a psychological perspective on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding health and participation. We detail how interventions mindful of children's educational and participatory capacity offer the potential to moderate effects of climate anxiety. We discuss limitations of the term 'climate anxiety' for describing the experience of children from the Global South, preferring a narrative of physical and mental health parity.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropogenic destruction to the environment and resulting loss of biodiversity present a serious threat to children's and future generations' enjoyment of fundamental rights including health and security. Recent estimates calculate that a distressing 1.7 million children lose their lives annually as a result of

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avoidable environmental impacts, while millions more suffer the consequences of side-effects of disease, are displaced from their homes or miss out on receiving basic education.[1] Further, the UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), a recent measure generating global evidence on children at risk of climate and environmental hazards or stress, finds that children are disproportionately affected by climate change.[2] Where 'child' is defined as in the UN Convention as a person under the age of eighteen years, approximately 500 million children live in areas with very high risk of flooding, and nearly 160 million in areas of extreme or high risk of drought. These stresses negatively impact development progress, and exacerbate deprivation and/or humanitarian situations affecting children or vulnerable households and groups. Developed countries are not immune. Air pollution causes over 1,200 premature child and adolescent deaths per year in Europe and significantly increases the risk of disease later in life.[3]

Multiple or cascading factors including conflict crises, deepened by lack of resources due to climate change, together with income inequality and poverty, mean that there is additionally a global refugee and displacement crisis within, between and outside of all our national borders. Other global pressures, including climate change, are impacting the Global South population's access to food, clean water and economic and political stability. Consider the Ukraine crisis, when the Republic of Ireland received an unprecedented 50,000 refugees in less than a year.[4] The inevitable psychological demand this crisis presents reminds us daily how catastrophic and increasingly regular human-made or natural disasters can be, not only for humanity as whole but for those most affected, including children. That is why last year, when the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) directed the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to send out a call to relevant stakeholders for assistance with Draft General Comment No. 26,[5] we decided as a Special Interest Group in Human Rights and Psychology (SIGHRP) to respond. In particular, we welcomed the opportunity to comment on the connection between child and adolescent mental health and human rights obligations: that is, to advocate for policies and initiatives to address this issue in the context of climate change as the call required, both domestically and internationally.

[1]United Nations UN Draft General Comment No. 26, available at: https://childrightsenvironment.org/about (7 June 2023).

[2]UNICEF, 'The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index', available at: https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis (7 June 2023).

[3]European Environmental Agency, 'Air pollution and children's health', available at: https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-pollution-and-childrens-health (7 June 2023).

[4]Central Statistics Office, 'Arrivals from Ukraine in Ireland Series 5', available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/p-aui/arrivalsfromukraineinirelandseries5/ (31 July 2023).

[5]Call document, available at: https://childrightsenvironment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/First-Draft_General-Comment-No.-26_November-2022.pdf (7 June 2023).

In what follows, we provide an account and discussion of the submission from a psychological health perspective on climate anxiety and its differing effects on children, in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) regarding health (UNCRC, art. 24) and participation (UNCRC, art. 12). We detail how interventions mindful of children's educational and participatory capacity offer elements of rights priority with the potential to moderate effects of climate anxiety and its consequences. Finally, we discuss limitations of the term 'climate anxiety' for describing the experience of children of the Global South, presenting a narrative of physical and mental health parity to describe the anxiety–trauma continuum experienced globally.

CLIMATE ANXIETY: CHILDREN'S SUFFERING AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Since the previous Draft General Comment No. 26, innovative medical and mental health research has begun to document the relationship between climate anxiety and anxiety disorders. 'Climate anxiety' refers to how we may perceive, fear or dread the impacts of climate change via anxiety and fear for immediate and future threats.[6] Climate anxiety may be for oneself and one's own family (egoistic), for future generations (social–altruistic), or for the environment and animals (biospheric).[7] The American Psychiatric Association *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* categorises anxiety disorders as groups of symptoms that are chronic and severe, manifesting as clinically maladaptive behaviours including restlessness, irritability, panic, and sleep and digestive disturbance.[8] Symptoms diverge across age and specific presentation, but may include negative thinking, restlessness, feelings of panic or experiencing panic attacks, and disrupted sleep.[9] Climate anxiety has been associated with clinical behavioural clusters including excessive worrying, difficulty sleeping, and negative impacts on work, study and family relationships.[10] Globally, it is increasingly accepted that children's mental health and well-being are affected as a result of climate change.[11] Although mental

[6]Susan Clayton and Bryan T. Karazsia, 'Development and validation of a measure of climate change anxiety', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 69 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101434

[7]Sabrina V. Helm, Amanda Pollitt, Melissa A. Barnett, Melissa A. Curran and Zelieann R. Craig, 'Differentiating environmental concern in the context of psychological adaptation to climate change', *Global Environmental Change* 48 (2018), 158–67.

[8]American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5* (Washington, DC, 2013). See also WHO, *International classification of diseases, 11th revision (ICD-11)*, available at: https://icd.who.int/en (28 July 2023).

[9]Helm *et al*., 'Differentiating environmental concern in the context of psychological adaptation to climate change'.

[10]Caroline Hickman, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, R. Eric Lewandowski, Elouise E. Mayall, *et al*., 'Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about governmental responses to climate change: a global survey', *Lancet Planetary Health* 5 (2021), e863–73: a global survey, conducted in 10 countries, of climate anxiety in 10,000 youth aged 16–25 years.

[11]Nick Obradovich, Robyn Migliorini, Martin P. Paulus and Iyad Rahwan, 'Empirical evidence of mental health risks posed by climate change', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115 (2018), 10953–10958.

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health is affected by social determinants of health including poverty, food security, nutrition, neighbourhood or community, and trauma, climate change and its environmental impact are compounding these effects for children.[12] That said, climate anxiety, and expressing one's anxiousness about it via thoughts and feelings, may provoke preventative or restorative interventions. Climate anxiety therefore presents us with a paradox—it is not pathological, because the anxiety that results is often grounded in rational fear.

Not a pathology! Climate anxiety as a threat to children's rights

From a psychological perspective, on the one hand climate-anxious behaviour is healthy because it presents the impetus for an adaptive psychological, physiological or behavioural response to threats in the environment, but on the other hand recent research suggests experience of worry and distress in response to climate change may range from mild to clinical anxiety (e.g. excessive negative thought patterns that may result in distress accompanied by mild or, in rare cases, functional impairment).[13] That is, climate anxiety diverges from anxiety disorders because it presents a rational response to a real, major and global threat. Moreover, maladaptive climate anxiety may invoke feelings of helplessness or hopelessness that overwhelm and impact psychosocial health and well-being (or in some cases climate anxiety presents a dimension of a pre-existing anxiety disorder).[14] However, we do not advocate for pathologising climate anxiety. Rather, we shall argue that adaptations prompted by apprehension about climate change may facilitate pro-environmental behaviour and a sense of empowerment, thereby reasserting children's fundamental health right.[15]

SIGHRP submission to the UNCRC

The UN oversees human rights treaty bodies consisting of committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of all core international human rights treaties. There are ten human rights treaty bodies, and the CRC is the body of independent experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC by its States Parties.[16] The UNCRC is the most ratified treaty in history. Since its inception, its noble mission has motivated policy and law change to better protect children globally from violence and exploitation and to

[12]Maya K. Gislason, Angel M. Kennedy and Stephanie M. Witham, 'The interplay between social and ecological determinants of mental health for children and youth in the climate crisis', *International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health* 18 (9) (2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094573

[13]Tara J. Crandon, James G. Scott, Fiona J. Charlson and Hannah J. Thomas, 'A social–ecological perspective on climate anxiety in children and adolescents', *Nature Climate Change* 12 (2022), 123–131.

[14]Fiona Charlson, Suhailah Ali, Tarik Benmarhnia, Madeleine Pearl and Alessandro Massazza, 'Climate change and mental health: a scoping review', *International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health* 18 (2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094486

[15]Greta Thunberg, *No one is too small to make a difference: illustrated edition* (London, 2019).

[16]OHCHR, Committee on the Rights of the Child, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc (7 June 2023).

see that they receive essential nutrition and healthcare. The UNCRC is a treaty consisting of three parts and 54 articles, including Article 24 'recognising the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health'.[17] While all States Parties have an obligation to submit regular reports to the Committee on how well they are implementing the rights of children, the Committee has other duties including the adoption of general comments, whose calls to stakeholders can assist discussions to interpret the provisions of the UNCRC.[18]

Consider too that the CRC held discussions to develop guidelines for stakeholders for implementation of the UNCRC in 1991. These discussions led to the development of four General Principles to help in interpretation of the UNCRC. These four principles are critical to the realisation of all other rights: (i) elimination of discrimination (art. 2); (ii) the best interest of the child (art. 3); (iii) the right of the child to life, survival and development (art. 6); and (iv) the right of the child to be heard (art. 12). As a result, the child's voice is increasingly heard and their participation in society is more consciously enabled.

We are also acutely aware, as both health professionals and citizens, that there is so much more to be done. The SIGHRP welcomed the opportunity to comment on the connection between child and adolescent mental health and human rights obligations and advocate for policies and initiatives to address this issue in the context of climate change. In particular, we addressed the call under Section III, 'Specific rights of the Convention as they relate to the environment', B. The right to the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24), Item 27 … children's current and anticipated psychosocial, emotional and mental health problems and suffering caused by environmental harm. Aligning the PSI's first ever submission to a UN Draft General Comment meant we had to ask ourselves some pragmatic questions such as 'How relevant is the psychology profession as a stakeholder voice on the rights of the child or human rights broadly construed?' While this specific point was only one of many, anchoring our response to it made for a very focused and informative submission. Rather than present an exhaustive set of recommendations, we emphasised how we were highlighting concerns in line with UNCRC (art. 24) and how the issue of environmental degradation and children's awareness of it presents an important linkage to children's mental health and well-being. Applying the definition of a child as defined in the UN Convention as a person under the age of eighteen years, our

[17]UNCRC, available from Children's Rights Alliance Ireland: https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/UNCRCEnglish.pdf (7 June 2023).

[18]States Parties' obligations under General Comments, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/general-comments (7 June 2023).

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comment outlines potential elements of priority for consideration and advocacy from this perspective.

Next, we discuss how our positioning fits within the broader infrastructure of international human rights, and demonstrate how a connection could be made to mental health within the guidelines of the submission's remit.

The human rights and psychology movement

Following in the footsteps of international colleagues within the psychologies, the SIGHRP mandate asserts a clear role for psychologists to engage in human rights advocacy.[19] Late in 2022 an invitation from the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) was received by the PSI to 'contribute ideas on responses in crises and emergencies'. The PSI, through guidance from SIGHRP, proposed a set of human-rights-based recommendations to aid the IUPsyS policy mission for actions moving forward.[20] From our members' expertise in delivering guidance to those working with and having lived experiences of crisis and emergencies,[21] we proposed that a human-rights-based approach is vital to ensure adequate response to crises and emergencies by psychologists moving forward.

Applying the commonly understood interpretation of human rights as inalienable, fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (art. 2) states: 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind … [for example] made on the basis of political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs.' A human-rights-based approach therefore enables psychological science to better comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (art. 4) (e.g. for jurisdiction signatories), which seeks to 'abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination' against persons seeking psychological interventions. Continuing this logic, UNCRC (art. 24) states: 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the

[19]Kirby Huminuik, 'The five connections: a human rights framework for psychologists', *International Journal of Psychology* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12908; Kersten Söderström, Polli Hagenaars, Tony Wainwright and Ulrich Wagner, 'Human rights matter to psychology – psychology matters to human rights', *European Psychologist* 24 (2) (2019), 99–101; Tony Wainwright, Marlena Plavšić and Polli Hagenaars, 'Psychologists for human rights', *Psihologijske teme* 31 (1) (2022), 119–37; Neal S. Rubin and Roseanne L. Flores, *The Cambridge handbook of psychology and human rights* (Cambridge, 2020).

[20]Psychological Society of Ireland, *Psychological Society of Ireland Pronouncement to the International Union of Psychological Science IUPsyS regarding Responses in Crises and Emergencies*, *28 October 2022*, available at: https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/source/PSI%20submission%20to%20IUPsyS%20Responses%20in%20Crises%20and%20Emergencies.pdf (7 June 2023).

[21]SIGHRP, *Not reliving but living. Psychological first aid for refugee care: helpful do's and don'ts*, March 2022, available at: https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/source/SIGHRP%20-%20Rapid%20Response%20Psychology%20Tool%20Time%20of%20War%20Resources%20(Final).pdf (28 July 2023); SIGHRP, *Not reliving but living. Psychological first aid and critical resources for refugee care: helpful do's and don'ts*', April 2022, available at: https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/source/SIGHRP%20-%20Rapid%20Response%20Psychology%20Tool%20General.pdf (28 July 2023).

treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.' Further, UNCRC (art. 12) makes explicit non-discrimination for children, whereby 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child', and this includes issues related to health and well-being.

Recognising the shift in how equitable treatment should be provided for people and for children's health, Ireland is at present also advocating for human-rights-based reform to its own Mental Health Act 2001, that is, to 'move the Act towards empowering people accessing mental health services to make decisions about their own healthcare insofar as possible'.[22] This shift towards human-rights-based approaches to mental health practice aspires to promote, encourage and foster higher standards and good practices in their delivery:[23] for example, treating those experiencing psychological crises due to climate change (e.g. displacement trauma) more humanely without contributing to any additional trauma. In short, the human-rights-based approach will better inform how psychologists, within their mission and capacity, more mindfully respond and contribute to alleviating the psychological effects of those crises for individuals.

Climate anxiety as a psychological perspective on UNCRC Article 24

UNCRC (art. 24) recognises the right of the child to the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. While it is vital for States Parties to combat disease, provide adequate nutrition and clean drinking water, and intervene when the risk of environmental pollution presents, it is recommended that States Parties should also endeavour to recognise mental health's parity with physical health and allocate resources appropriately, so as to prevent illness and loss of well-being (e.g. tackling air pollution risks to neurodevelopmental skills[24] or enacting solutions to aid children and adolescents in adapting to their climate anxiety concerns; see also Report of the First Children and Young People's Consultation on the General Comment No. 26

[22]Houses of the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Mental Health, 'Report on pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft heads of bill to amend the Mental Health Act 2001', October 2022, p. 8, available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_sub_committee_on_mental_health/reports/2022/2022-10-12_report-on-pre-legislative-scrutiny-of-the-draft-heads-of-bill-to-amend-the-mental-health-act-2001_en.pdf (7 June 2023).

[23]Mental Health Commission, 'Supporting change strategic plan 2023–2027', May 2023, available at: https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2023-04/10876%20MHC%20Strategic%20Plan%202023-2027%20COMPLETED.pdf (7 June 2023).

[24]Annalisa Castagna, Eleonora Mascheroni, Silvia Fustinoni and Rosario Montirosso, 'Air pollution and neurodevelopmental skills in pre-school and school-aged children: a systematic review', *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 136 (2022), https://10.1016/j.neubiorev.2022.104623

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documents, 2022).[25] As we saw in our discussion earlier, asserting climate anxiety to be a psychological harm and therefore a negative impact on children's health, taken together with factors inciting people to flee or be displaced from their homes and national borders, is an infringement of health and security rights.[26]

The healing power of participation: a psychological perspective on UNCRC's Article 12

When psychological interventions are equally informed by psychological science and human-rights-based approaches, we can better assure autonomy and dignity of the individual experiencing crisis (e.g. ensuring person-centred treatment; assuring autonomy by using assisted decision-making approaches[27]). Likewise, psychological interventions that have key regulatory infrastructure to enable their effective participation with or uptake by individuals experiencing crisis (e.g. document and implement procedures around issues of consent) or difficulty[28] are more likely to be effective for health and legal safety.[29] That is why the SIGHRP submission supports foregrounding climate justice, by centring power operations in the child's personal sensemaking while recognising that the need for change is at political, structural, systemic and cultural levels.[30]

Increasingly, we see children across a range of ages and maturity readily demonstrate their understanding of the threat climate change poses.[31] In accordance with the UNCRC (art. 12), children who are capable of forming their own opinions have a right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them. Given an opportunity, many children and adolescents readily express their climate empathy[32] and climate distress,[33] and may even be uniquely predisposed to climate anxiety.[34] As psychologists, we understand that children and adolescents

[25]UN, 'Report of the first children and young people's consultation on General comment No. 26' (September 2022), available at: https://childrightsenvironment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Report-of-the-first-Children-andYoung-Peoples-Consultation.pdf (8 June 2023).

[26]UNDP, https://www.undp.org

[27]WHO Integrated People-Centred Care Directive, available at: www.who.int/health-topics/integrated-people-centered-care#tab=tab_1 (8 June 2023); Houses of the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Mental Health, 2022; Assisted Decision Making Act 2015, available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/64/enacted/en/html (8 June 2023).

[28]Matin Härter, Nora Moumjid, Jacquez Cornuz, Glyn Elwyn and Trudy van der Weijden, 'Shared decision making in 2017: international accomplishments in policy, research and implementation', *Z Evid Fortbild Qual Gesundhwes* 1–5 (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.zefq.2017.05.024

[29]Thomas Wenzel and Boris Drožđek, *An uncertain safety: integrative health care for the 21st century refugees* (Cham, 2018).

[30]Gareth Morgan, Garrett Barnwell, Lucy Johnstone, Kirsten Shukla and Annie Mitchell, 'The Power Threat Meaning Framework and the climate and ecological crises', *Psychology in Society* 63 (2022), 83–109.

[31]For example, Greta Thunberg (*Teen Vogue* special issue), available at: www.teenvogue.com/story/greta-thunberg-climatestrike-teen-vogue-special-issue-cover (8 June 2023).

[32]UN, 'Report of the first children and young people's consultation on General comment No. 26' (September 2022), available at: https://childrightsenvironment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Report-of-the-first-Children-andYoung-Peoples-Consultation.pdf (8 June 2023).

[33]Thunberg, *No one is too small to make a difference.*

[34]Crandon *et al*., 'A social-ecological perspective on climate anxiety in children and adolescents'.

are cognisant of the peril climate change presents to their life and future. Similarly to adults, they have the capacity to recognise the real psychological, physiological and social threat it presents to their environment and future.[35]

Regardless of the severity of climate anxiety or trauma experienced (e.g. climate empathy, climate distress, clinical anxiety),[36] SIGHRP advocates for climate change interventions and initiatives that seek to align with children and adolescent experience across the range. In particular, SIGHRP recommends initiatives that psychologically protect and empower children to be informed, expressive, family-centred, peer-supported, and intervention-enabled to adapt and measurably contribute to the alleviation of the climate crisis in their lifetime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Next, we detail our submission's recommendations from a psychological perspective. We provide justification for our recommendations for education and consumer empowerment within the particulars of the human rights instruments and frameworks previously outlined. Before reading these recommendations, please consider Table 1.

Recommendation 1: Allocate the resources of States Parties to climate change education and awareness raising

In the effort to help children and adolescents cope with the unavoidable impacts of climate change, best practice support requires systematic delivery, for example by introducing climate change education and resources at primary and secondary school age (ensuring that the needs of children and adolescents with disabilities are also met). Included in this curriculum, whether it be in supplementary, modular, optional or mandatory form, are teaching methods (e.g. digitally enabled) that best enable active participation by children, their teachers or educators, and their parents and guardians. Moreover, States Parties should enable children and adolescents to contribute their views and experiences on the development, implementation and monitoring of these education programme plans.[37] It is proposed that the central tenets of this curriculum:

- introduce child human rights and the UNCRC
- address the concept of climate anxiety and its relationship with child and adolescent mental health and well-being

[35]UNICEF, 'The climate crisis is a child rights crisis'.
[36]Morgan *et al*., 'The Power Threat Meaning Framework and the climate and ecological crises'.
[37]OHCHR, 'General comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence', available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-commentno-20-2016-implementation-rights (8 June 2023).

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- action health and well-being strategies to children that foster their coping and adaptive behaviour.

Research shows that children who are knowledgeable about the UNCRC, and have their views taken into account when decisions affecting them are made, rate measurably higher on subjective well-being indicators than those who do not.[38]

Recommendation 2: Promote consumer empowerment agendas to enable children to participate in environmentally friendly and healthy consumer choices

UNCRC (art. 12) affirms that children who are capable of forming their own opinions have a right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them, in so much as the views of the child are given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Consider that children tend to become brand-aware from the age of nine to eleven years[39] and children's influence on parental purchase decisions is well documented,[40] whether it be positive or negative. The UN Convention acknowledges the family as the fundamental unit of society and not only advocates for the role of parents as the primary caregivers with responsibility for the upbringing of their children but obliges governments to help parents fulfil their essential role. Moreover, the UNCRC (art. 17) details children's right to appropriate information and encourages States Parties to develop and adopt appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to their well-being:[41] for example, that States Parties promote and make mandatory an independently verified label for environmental excellence, with guaranteed low environmental impact (e.g. the use of the EU Ecolabel).[42] Therefore, it is recommended that States Parties prioritise and support climate-change-informed and family-centred purchasing aided by responsible public messaging to offset human rights abuses by third parties, including businesses. Improvements in education (see Recommendation 1 above) and responsible public messaging will in

[38]Ferran Casas, Mònica González-Carrasco and Xevi Luna, 'Children's rights and their subjective well-being from a multinational perspective', *European Journal of Education* 53 (2018), 336–50.

[39]Fei Wang and Li Shu, 'When does product brand matter to children?', *International Journal of Market Research* 61 (4) (2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853188026

[40]Vytautas Dikcius, Sigitas Urbonavicius, Vilmante Pakalniskiene and Indre Pikturniene, 'Children's influence on parental purchase decisions: scale development and validation', *International Journal of Market Research* 62 (4) (2019), 449–67.

[41]Office of the Children's Ombudsman Ireland, 'Public consultation on the regulation of harmful content on online platforms and the implementation of the Revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive', available at: https://www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2019/04/OCO-Submission_DCCAEOnlineSafetyConsultation_April2019.pdf (8 June 2023).

[42]EU Ecolabel, information available at: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/eu-ecolabel-home_en (8 June 2023).

turn help children cope with the unavoidable impacts of climate change. It is proposed that enabling participatory and well-informed consumer decisions is likely to support children as non-complicit actors in the climate crisis, thereby countering climate anxiety and promoting climate-informed well-being.

Recommendation 3: Establish an international 'Climate Justice Safe Space Forum' for children to raise product marketing concerns

In making these recommendations, the findings of the UN's First Children and Young People's Consultation (2022) regarding UNCRC Draft General Comment No. 26 calling on governments to take action on the environmental crisis have been taken into account. Climate justice and just transition themes rank high on children's climate agenda, whether it be voiced in this call's consultation, by the UN[43] or by the National Youth Assembly on Climate in Ireland.[44] It is recommended that an international forum (or sub-forum), with specific remit to attend to products and their marketing, be established. This forum would highlight how intended, unintended, foreseen and unforeseen consequences or side-effects of product marketing or merchandise strategy targeted at children make their consumer choices complicit in damaging or exploiting the environment, their health and well-being, or the health and welfare of other children either locally or globally. This forum should be internationally resourced, be presided over by children for children, present a safe space to facilitate children's voices and conjectures, and give due attention to testing the legitimacy of their concerns. Such a forum will better enable children's collective voice, including seldom heard voices of minority children and those with disabilities,[45] to compel clear and transparent actions from corporations and campaign for climate justice on an international stage.[46]

It is not intended that this forum be considered a replacement for expectations that States Parties address their general targets associated with the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs).[47] States Parties should remain committed to fully implementing all actions required to meet national climate targets: that is, to remove and reduce the risks posed by climate change to children's

[43]UN Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, available at: https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/youth-in-action/youth-advisory-group (28 July 2023).

[44]Deirdre Fullerton, *Report of the National Youth Assembly on Climate* (2022), available at: www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/240077/89733538-2da4-4a96-843d-0375db9e21b9.pdf#page=nul (8 June 2023).

[45]Vera Clemens, Eckhart von Hirschhausen and Jörg M. Fegert, 'Report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change: implications for the mental health policy of children and adolescents in Europe—a scoping review', *European Journal of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 31 (2022), 701–13.

[46]Gislason *et al*., 'The interplay between social and ecological determinants of mental health for children and youth in the climate crisis'.

[47]OHCHR, 'General comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence'.

[188.119.21.121] Project MUSE (2024-09-19 15:35 GMT)

health and mental health, and to complement and add constructively to progress successful implementation of general targets.[48] Moreover, advocating for children's rights in this way will encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for their protection from information and material injurious to their present and prospective health and well-being.

CONCLUSION

That the climate crisis affects children's well-being and presents a serious threat to future generations' enjoyment of the right to the highest standard of health and security has been made clear. We presented the PSI SIGHRP's submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in advance of the drafting of Draft General Comment No. 26, and made the case that environmental degradation and children's awareness of it impact children's mental health. We explored the psychological evidence that climate anxiety is a real and pressing issue affecting child and adolescent health and well-being, and that it has differing effects on children depending on their context. Specifically, we attended to rights of significant psychological interest to the argument, including the UNCRC regarding health (art. 24) and participation (art. 12). Finally, we detailed how interventions corresponding to the aforementioned rights (i.e. that are mindful of children's educational and participatory capacity) offer elements of priority, with the potential to alleviate effects of climate anxiety and its consequences for children's health and security.

We also recognise that much of the evidence comes from the Western countries (i.e. the Global North), and the paradox of climate justice is that those who contribute least to climate change suffer most insecurity and understand more about the impetus to migrate. In line with other researchers, SIGHRP believes a research agenda reflecting a global perspective is required, to increase share of voice by non-Western countries.[49] Indigenous peoples and children connected to the natural world are most impacted by climate anxiety—indeed climate trauma[50]—and are therefore identified as vulnerable. For many children in the Global South, the experience of climate crisis limits opportunities and reshapes futures and can lead to displacement.

Finally, trauma-informed border policies drawing on a human rights lens lie ahead for the psychology profession in Ireland, with many legal and regulatory changes on the horizon. It is important to seek out and create new legitimate

[48] *Creating our future: expert committee report* (2022), available at: https://creatingourfuture.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Creating-Our-Future-EXPERT-Report.pdf (28 July 2023).

[49] Yumiko Coffey, Navjot Bhullar, Joanne Durkin, Md Shahidul Islam and Kim Usher, 'Understanding eco-anxiety: a systematic scoping review of current literature and identified knowledge gaps', *Journal of Climate Change & Health* 3 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2021.100047

[50] Morgan *et al.*, 'The Power Threat Meaning Framework and the climate and ecological crises'.

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of children's health and security rights (UNCRC), their matched human security rights as set out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and corresponding features of psychological security and recommendations consistent with its facilitation

Human rights ⇆	Children's rights ⇆	Human security ⇆	Psychological security ⇆	Recommendations ⇆
UDHR art. 2	UNCRC art. 24 & art. 12	UNDP health security & Community security	Parity of mental and physical health & Participation as empowerment	Education initiatives & Consumer empowerment

While there is no universal definition of human security, the UNDP has identified seven components of human security, including 'health security' (the ability of individuals and communities to access healthcare services and information, and to maintain good physical and mental health, e.g. parity of services) and 'community security' (the ability of individuals and communities to live in peaceful and cohesive societies, where people have a sense of belonging and are able to participate in decision-making processes).

spaces in the legal landscape for the voice of psychologists to be heard, and this paper aspires to provide the thought infrastructure and legal landscape to assist. The case for a bidirectional approach to human-rights-based intervention, to implement proposed recommendations (Table 1) in part or equally, should depend on the evidence from psychological perspectives to assist the implementation of children's rights. We foresee this bidirectional dynamic as critical, if we are to address the narrative around climate anxiety–trauma as a continuum that children experience globally, rather than categorise children's experience as being from the Global North or Global South. These premises will potentially hold true for health and mental health of children and their guardians, whether they stay where they are or seek out a better future regardless of where they reside.

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