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Awareness & Prevention of Eco-Anxiety in Cook County, Illinois

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action:

Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy

Social Change Portfolio

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Contents

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OVERVIEW

Keywords: #Chicago, #eco-anxiety, #prevention, #eco-grief, #Cook County, #environmental anxiety, #environmental wellbeing

Awareness & Prevention of Eco-Anxiety in Cook County, Illinois

Goal Statement: To reduce the prevalence of eco-anxiety in adolescents and young adults from Chicago's western neighborhoods and close suburbs

Significant Findings:

Eco-anxiety, "a chronic, [pervasive] unspecfied fear of environmental doom" (Dodds, 2021, p. 22) is emerging as a mental health issue among youth and young adults worldwide. Spurred by global warming, 53 percent of Americans are now "very" or "extremely" concerned about climate change (Leiserowitz, et al., 2023). Chicagoans are encountering more storms, poorer air quality, more health problems, and higher rates of high school depression and age-adjusted drug overdose (e.g., National Weather Service, n. d.; Chicago Department of Public Health, 2020; Whitmore-Williams, et al., 2017; Tsevreni, et al., 2023). Teens and young adults (notably, but not limited to Blacks and people of color) are particularly vulnerable as they encouter negative eco-events (both personally and through media exposure) and realize they will inherit a severely damaged environment they did nothing to cause. The goal of this portfolio is to introduce programs to reduce the prevalence of eco-anxiety by bolstering self-efficacy and personal as well as community resilience. Preventative programs can tap into ecological theory, social cognitive "learning" theory, and the principles of community organizing. Critical is to offer programs that appeal strongly to personal self-efficacy but provide collective intergenerational opportunities for environmental improvement. Active engagement is key.

Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps:

- The target region is ethnically and racially diverse. Strategies and interventions need to be viable for whites, Blacks, and Latinos.
- Develop a psychoeduction program in a neutral setting to establish a firm foundation of baseline knowledge about the pervasiveness, risks, and consequence of global warming and climate change. Engage in supportive discussions about direct and/or vicarious eco-related events and concerns to break down feelings of eco-isolation.
- Gain an understanding of how environmental laws and environmental programs are developed by reaching out to local Cook County agencies, such as the Illinois EPA and the Illinois Environmental Council.
- Initiate an eco-focused community organizing effort that follows the Steps for Resilience process (U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, n.d.) and engages youth in key roles alongside supportive, knowledgeable adults and relevant agency personnel. Identify and focus on an eco-issue meaningful to the immediate neighborhood to create positive momentum.
- Search online and network with colleagues to identify potential grant opportunities consistent with the community organizing effort. Tap into creative resources (e.g., the father of a fellow student in this class) with knowledge and expertise on environmental grants. Engage youth in all phases of this effort, especially brainstorming.
- Encourage youth involved in any of the above efforts to create a social media outreach campaign focused on sharing their environmntal knowledge and experiences. Establish "environmental ambassador" role (similar to a social media "brand ambassador, but focused on eco-issues).

INTRODUCTION

Awareness and Prevention of Eco-Anxiety in Cook County, IL

Last summer, the Chicago metro area was beset by winds that drove the smoke from forest fires well north of the region into the heart of the city and its surrounding suburbs. Days of soot, haze, and dire warnings by local officials to limit time outdoors followed, exacerbated by warmer than average temperatures. While unusual, this experience (especially when combined with the almost snowless winters of the past two years) caused residents to take notice. Chicago is changing. Air pollution and global warming are real – with important ramifications for our physical and mental health, as well as our daily lives.

PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

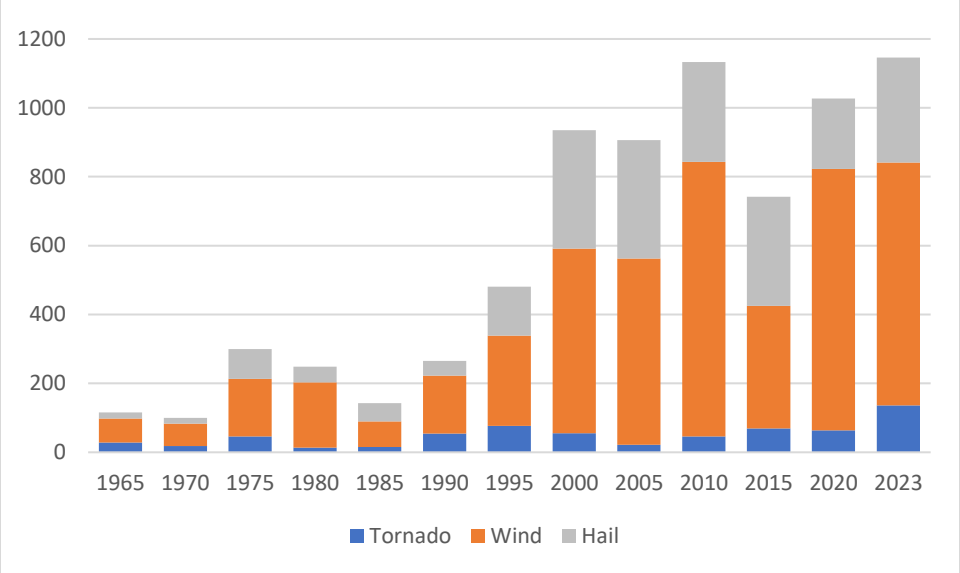
Awareness and Prevention of Eco-Anxiety in Cook County, IL

My social change portfolio is about eco-anxiety in Cook County, Illinois, specifically western Chicago and Oak Park, an adjacent suburb. Eco-anxiety is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as "a chronic unspecified fear of environmental doom" that incorporates trauma related to the uncertain future of humanity, intergenerational betrayal, and loss of culture (Dodds, p. 222). In this section, I will examine trends related to eco-anxiety and explain why prevention is important.

Eco-anxiety stems from global warming, a small rise in the earth's temperature (1.5^{o} C) that is expected to cause dramatic climate change. In Chicago, 2012 is officially listed as the warmest year on record since 1871; and five of the ten warmest years have occurred since (2012, 2017, 2020, 2021 and 2023) (National Weather Service, n.d.). In addition, the number of tornadoes, windstorms, and hailstorms have increased almost 9-fold in the Chicago metro area since 1965, as shown in Chart 1. Almost three-quarters of Americans now believe that global

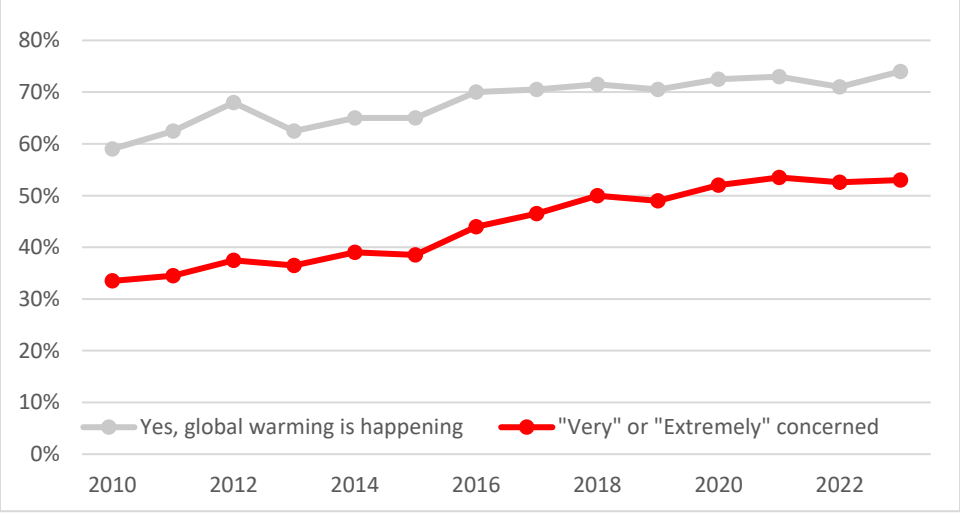
warming is real, and more than half are “extremely” or “very” sure, as shown in Chart 2 (Leiserowitz et al., 2023). Experiencing the impacts of global warming first-hand is critical – skeptics are significantly more likely to change their beliefs after personally witnessing climate change events in their own communities (Whitmore-Williams, et al., 2021).

Chart 1. Number of Storms in Chicago Metro Area, by Year



Source: National Weather Service

Chart 2. American’s Attitudes about the Reality of Global Warming, Age 18+

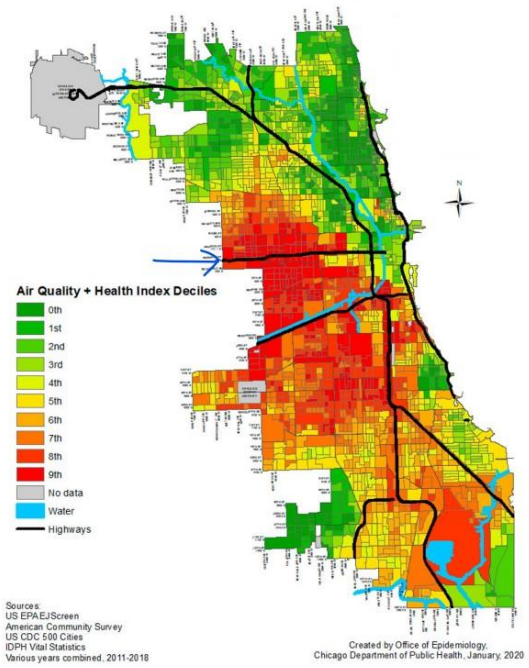


Source: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, as appeared in Leiserowitz, et al., 2023

Climate change is poised to get worse in Chicago. Although the level of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the metro declined 9 percent between 2010 and 2109, this pace is too slow to achieve goals set by the Paris Agreement to stem global warming (CMAP, n.d.). The situation is exacerbated by air pollution: as levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) rise, the weather becomes hotter and drier, and as weather patterns stagnate over a region, PM2.5 further increases, resulting in a vicious cycle of climate change (Tai, et al., 2010; IQAir, 2022). Average levels of PM2.5 rose to 10.8 micrograms per cubic meter in Cook County in 2018 and 2019 (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2020) and remain elevated (IQAir, n.d.; American Lung Association, 2024), exceeding those in Illinois and the nation, by 23 percent and 46 percent, respectively (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2020). Cook County PM2.5 levels also exceed the new EPA limits set in March 2024 (Federal Register, 2024).

Chicago's air quality is worst on the west side, as shown by the red fill in the map below.

Map 1. Air Quality & Health Index, City of Chicago, 2020

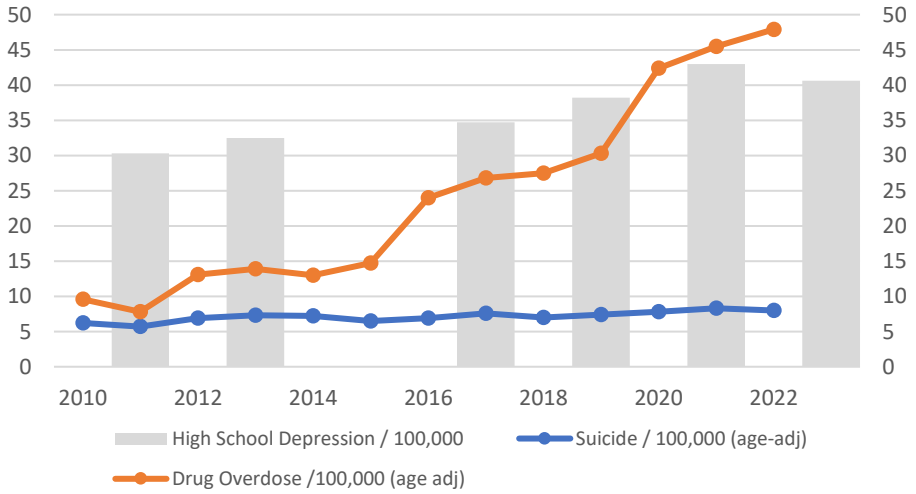


Source: Chicago Department of Public Health, 2020.
NOTE: Blue arrow marks the area for proposed prevention program.

These areas are near highways – a concern since 8 percent of Cook County residents live and 48 percent of schools are located within 2 blocks of a major highway, a significant pollution exposure risk (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Moreover, these areas also tend to be low-income, with significant unemployment and a disproportionate percentage of Black and Hispanic residents (Chicago Department of Public Health, 2020).

Global warming and associated air pollution have debilitating economic as well as mental and physical health consequences. Last year, the American Red Cross (2023) recorded 25 extreme weather disasters greater than $1 billion across the United States, an 80 percent increase over the past decade. The mental health consequences of global warming ("eco-anxiety") can manifest in many ways, including depression, anxiety, trauma, PTSD, suicide, substance abuse, violence / aggression, helplessness / fatalism, and concern about the future (Whitmore-Williams, et al., 2017, 2021), depending on an individual's personal experience. For example, in the Chicago metro area, depression among high school students increased 34 percent between 2011 and 2023, while age-adjusted mortality rates from suicide and drugs increased 29 percent and 400 percent, respectively, as shown in Chart 3 (Chicago Health Atlas, n.d.).

Chart 3. Rates of Mental Health Issues in Related to Eco-Anxiety, Chicago Metro Area



Source: Chicago Health Atlas

Eco-anxiety can also manifest as compound stress that results in risky behaviors (e.g., over-eating), physical disorders (e.g., memory loss, problems sleeping), and the onset and/or exacerbation of chronic ailments (Whitmore-Williams, et al., 2017). The mortality rate for heart disease is rising in Cook County, and that of chronic lower respiratory disease (including asthma and COPD) is stubbornly stable. The prevalence of these diseases is also high, putting many at risk (asthma: 7,353 / 100,000, cardiovascular disease: 6,649 / 100,000, and COPD: 4,680 / 100,000) (American Lung Association, 2020).

Youth and young adults are particularly vulnerable to eco-anxiety and its mental and physical consequences (Whitmore-Williams, et al., 2017, 2021). They are worried and upset. Seven in ten American 16- to 25-year-olds are at least moderately worried about climate change and almost half are very or extremely worried. They feel powerless and angry: 78 percent blame earlier generations for the current state of the environment, and more than two-thirds blame government officials. They perceive the future as a "frightening place" (Hickman et al., 2021)

Based on this analysis, my goal is to reduce the prevalence of eco-anxiety in adolescents and young adults from Chicago's western neighborhoods and close suburbs (marked by the blue arrow in Map 1).

PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Awareness and Prevention of Eco-Anxiety in Cook County, Illinois

Bronfrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is a comprehensive, multi-factor explanation of human development. It posits that people function within and are influenced by five successively broader, interconnected ecological systems (Guy-Evans, 2020). Risk factors (which can ***lead*** to negative outcomes) and protective factors (which can ***mitigate*** negative outcomes)

are important to consider for each system when developing prevention initiatives. Interactions among factors from across the ecological systems is common (SAMHSA, n.d.). In this section, I will present risk and protective factors that influence the development of eco-anxiety in adolescents and young adults, focusing on the first four ecological systems; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem.

The microsystem focuses on an individual's closest, most intimate interactions, which are typically bi-directional (Guy-Evans, 2020), as well as individual differences and developmental issues. Preliminary evidence exists that parental engagement in clear pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., recycling; product boycotts) can, by modeling earth-friendly practices, serve as a protective factor for adolescent eco-anxiety (Gronhoj & Thogersen 2012, as appeared in Agoston et al., 2024; Agoston et al., 2024). Relevant developmental differences that serve as risk factors for adolescent eco-anxiety include pre-existing chronic physical or mental health problems (e.g., heart disease, asthma, etc.) as well as less ability to process and manage stress, combined with (when stressed) a higher tendency to exhibit extreme emotions (Nutkewicz, et al., 2023). A critical individual risk factor is connectedness to the environment and the natural world, such that those with stronger bonds are more prone to eco-anxiety (Coffey et al., 2023 as appeared in Nutkiewicz et al., 2023); however, this may be mediated by self-efficacy (confidence in one's ability to act in a manner to achieve a desired goal), a protective factor. Resilience, the innate ability to overcome adversity, also mediates eco-anxiety and serves as a protective factor (Lei & Guoliang, 2023).

The mesosystem focuses on the relationship between two or more microsystems, which may be productive or confrontational (Guy-Evans, 2020). Personally experiencing an eco-event; (i.e., the interaction of one's own microsystem with the microsystem of an eco-event) is a risk

factor, enhancing the dire reality of global warming (Tsevreni, et al., 2023). This risk factor is exacerbated by those who have experienced prior trauma or excessive stress of any type (Nutkiewicz, et al., 2023). On the other hand, involvement in a green organization can serve as a protective factor such that the interaction of the leader's microsystem with one's own enhances one's pro-environmental beliefs (Smith, et al., 2021).

The exosystem focuses on formal and informal community structures (Guy-Evans, 2020). Casual and repeated media exposure to climate change consequences (e.g., the aftermath of frequent tornadoes) is a risk factor for eco-anxiety and associated PTSD (Ortiz, et al., 2011; Hall, et al., 2019 as appeared in Nadarajah, 2022). However *proactive* pursuit of climate change information is a protective factor that can facilitate adaptation to global warming as well as the adoption of relevant coping strategies (Nadarajah, 2022). Youth environmental activism, including overt participation in eco-boycotts, marches/protests, and other events as well as endorsement of pro-environment governmental policies, are other protective factors that incorporate motivation and commitment to positive change (Tsevreni, et al., 2023; Smith, et al., 2021). Critically important, however, is that youth activism be overtly supported by adults, through school-, religious-, or other community-based organizations, that efforts to prevent burnout (another risk factor) be established (Nutkiewicz, et al., 2023), and that the focus be on collective rather than individual action, preferably with a clear, distinct environmental impact (Schwartz et al., 2023).

The macrosystem focuses on cultural elements, including attitudes, mores, norms, values, and socio-economic status (SES) (Guy-Evans, 2020). Low SES and related issues (e.g., poverty, substandard housing, unemployment and other elements of economic disadvantage) are risk factors for eco-anxiety. In addition, low SES communities typically have an aging infrastructure

and few-to-no resources for eco-prevention programs (Tsevreni, et al., 2023). Low SES is often associated with communities that have a disproportionate Black and/or Hispanic population, another risk factor (Whitmore-Williams, et al., 2021; Nutkiewicz, et al., 2023). Future-oriented concerns, specifically dread about one day bearing the burden of a dying earth they did not cause is another risk factor for youth eco-anxiety (Joireman, et al., 2016, as appeared in Nadarajah, 2022). The dread of eco-burden is exacerbated by an overall lack of power and control, a common attribute of adolescence (Nutkiewicz, et al., 2023). On the other hand, community resilience (the belief that one's community can bounce back from challenges, including eco ones) is a protective factor (Smith et al., 2021).

PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

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Two theoretical frameworks are relevant to eco-anxiety prevention. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) operates at an interpersonal level. Theory associated with social relationships operate at the community level and can be implemented through community organizing principles. In this section, I will summarize SCT and the principles of community organizing, then explain their relevance to eco-anxiety prevention. In explaining community organizing, I will draw upon social identity theory. I will conclude by presenting Steps to Resilience, an existing, evidence-based preventive program for eco-anxiety that is based on community organizing.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Community Organizing

SCT is based on the premise of reciprocal determinism: that individual differences, environmental factors (including social, economic, political and techological), and our behavior

interact with each other to elicit change. Self-efficacy (a belief in one's competence) is at the heart of this theory, influencing both our goals and our anticipated outcomes (National Cancer Institute, 2005). SCT is based on learning theory. Within this framework, change occurs through modeling (learning vicariously by observing and internalizing the experiences of others) and reinforcements (stimuli that motivate / "reward" either the expression of desired behaviors or the cessation of undesired behaviors). Rewards may be external (a tangible product or service, like a Starbucks gift card) or internal (a sense of achievement or enjoyment). Internal rewards yield stronger, more consistent, and more permanent change (National Cancer Institute, 2005; Bandura and Cherry, 2019).

Community organizing is a logical and systemic "bottom-up" process for creating and implementing prevention programs, often among the disadvantaged. It is not a theory, per se, but a practical framework that operationalizes theories related to social relationships and/or social systems (National Cancer Institute, 2005). The premise of this approach is that "the community" actively drives all phases of the process from determining which issues to address, to assessing resources, to developing / enacting programs that close community gaps. The social action model of community organizing holds that participation is motivated by self-interest: the belief that one's personal active involvement results directly in beneficial change. Long-term, the goal is to expand the sphere of "community" influence from a few individuals to the wider neighborhood, city, county, state, and beyond (National Cancer Institute, 2005). Key elements of community organizing that reflect its overall philosophy include active participation as equal partners and empowerment (ability to gain a decision-making voice). Key elements of community organizing that speak directly to process include issue relevance (focusing on the most important concerns), issue selection (sorting through complex inter-related issues to clearly define community focus),

and critical consciousness (ability to identify and address root causes). A final key element is community capacity, which is the overall personality or nature of a community, e.g., openness to diversity, established political coalitions, etc. (National Cancer Institute, 2005).

SCT and community organizing complement each other well as foundations for establishing eco-anxiety prevention programs. SCT-based research helps explain engagement in climate change prevention programs at a *personal* level. For example, a science exhibit at a public aquarium increased individual awareness of climate change and subsequent engagement in potential personal solutions like consolidating errands to use less gasoline; (Katz-Kimchi and Atkinson, 2014). Similarly, consistent with SCT, personal pursuit of green consumption behavior (reduce, re-use, recycle) has been linked to individual factors (such as green self-efficacy), environmental factors (such as avoidance of social sanctions), and greater willingness to share personal outcome expectations via social media (Lin and Hsu, 2013). While there is less empirical evidence that links SCT with engagement in *collective* pro-environment programs, Bandura and Cherry (2019) hypothesized that social media can lead to such programs both directly and by connecting young people with common eco-interests together, boosting green self-efficacy. Others have pushed the role of social relationships and social identity in collective engagement of pro-environment programs further, speaking to key elements of the community organizing framework. For example, Fritsche et al. (2018) present a model of pro-environmental behavior that incorporates in-group identification, in-group norms and in-group goals (all of which are precursors to empowerment and self-interest) as well as collective efficacy beliefs (which help ensure eco-focused issue relevance, issue selection, and critical consciousness). Some empirical support is available. For example, Sweetman and Whitmarsh (2016) have shown that when in-group identification is strong, high-credibility models of pro-environmental

behavior increase collective engagement in political programs to prevent or reduce climate change (such as writing to a congressman).

Existing Evidence-based Program

Steps to Resilience is a community organizing framework developed in 2014 by an inter-agency team coordinated by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to help leaders across the United States instill environmental resilience in their communities (and thereby help prevent eco-anxiety). Preventive goals are two-pronged: to create climate-friendly initiatives that will benefit the earth and its people, and to proactively identify "*opportunities* presented by changing climate conditions" (U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, n.d., emphasis added). NOAA provides the framework as well as a comprehensive toolkit of more than 500 electronic resources and documents to help facilitate each step of the framework. Steps to Resilience is modeled on similar successful programs developed by the Kresge Foundation, Oxfam America, FEMA, and other organizations. Almost 300 case studies have been published highlighting successful applications of this approach throughout the United States (U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, n.d.).

There are six steps to resilience (U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, n.d.). The first, planning, involves selecting a "climate champion" (leader), a diverse work team, and a general environmental issue, culminating in a public announcement. The issue chosen should be consistent with community values and yield equitable outcomes for all stakeholders (no group should be favored or burdened). The second step focuses on a deeper analysis of the environmental issue. The work team compares community assets (the things that make a community unique and economically viable) to emerging environmental challenges to determine the nature and extent of likely consequences. Potentially vulnerable community assets are

identified and in step three, the levels of vulnerability and risk are quantified. In step four, team members brainstorm solutions for improving the resiliency of community assets that are at the apex of being both most likely and most severely impacted by climate change. To this end, the team may rely on experts, case studies, public involvement, and consultants. These alternative solutions are then evaluated using a multi-factor decision model that integrates cost, environmental impact, ease of implementation and other key factors. Through consensus building and trade-off discussions, the team will select an approach (step five) and create a detailed plan with timeline and milestones. This plan is implemented in step six, with the intent to track both the completion and effectiveness of key milestones.

PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Awareness and Prevention of Eco-Anxiety in Cook County, IL

Consistent with the fragmentation of the U.S. population among a multititude of demographic, socio-economic, political, religious, and gender / sexual orientation lines, it is important to consider the role of diversity when planning prevention programs. Also, regardless of diversity, ethical factors must be adequately addressed. In this section, I will discuss how Black Americans perceive and experience climate change differently than Whites. I will then present some culturally relevant considerations for eco-anxiety prevention programs targeted to Black youth. Finally, I will close by highlighting ethical issues of note for program execution.

Cultural Sub-Group Related to Eco-Anxiety

The target population for my project is teens and young adults. A specific sub-group for additional focus is Black youth. The geographic area I have targeted (blue arrow on Map 1) includes Oak Park, a middle-class, racially diverse community that is 19 percent Black and the

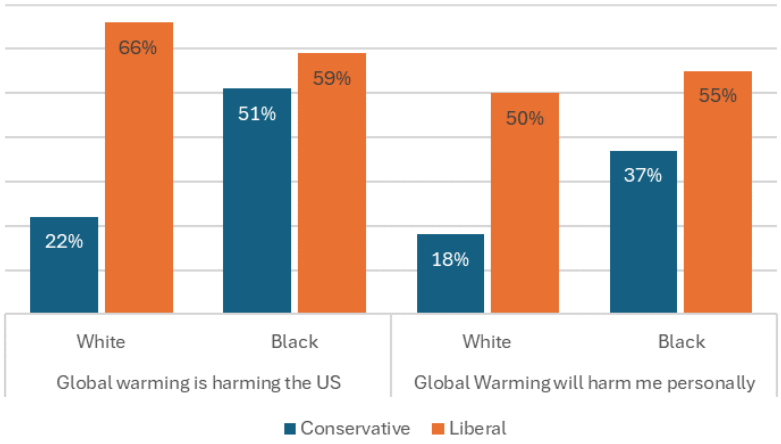
Austin neighborhood of Chicago, a community classified by high economic hardship[1], which is 81 percent Black (Data USA, n.d.; Chicago Department of Public Health, 2021).

Contrary to public opinion, Blacks are at least on par with Whites regarding concern about climate change and support for associated governmental policies, and to some extent, they are less skeptical. For example, 59 percent of Blacks believe global warming will harm the U.S., and 49 percent believe they will be personally harmed, versus 49 percent and 33 percent of Whites, respectively (Ballew, et al., 2021). While they internalize environmental woes, Blacks have been slow to convert this concern to concrete preventative actions (Elias, et al., 2019). Part of this mismatch may stem from perceived isolation: Blacks are significantly less likely than Whites to believe that others in their in-group (community) are actively engaged in green issues (Elias et al., 2019). Potential support for environmental issues may come from another source: religion. Blacks are significantly more likely than Whites to perceive a positive relationship between religion and green behavior (Elias et al., 2019). This link is rooted in Black American's strong relationship to faith and spirituality, esp. within Black congregations, which have played an important historic role in fighting oppression and inequality (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Optimism is further bolstered in the political arena, where polarity in political ideologies regarding environmental issues is significantly more diluted among Blacks. The gap between Black liberals and Black conservatives is much narrower than among their White counterparts, creating opportunity for common ground. For example, the gap between White liberals and White conservatives on whether global warming is harming the U.S. is 44 percentage points, compared to only 7 percentage points among Blacks (Ballew et al., 2021).

[1] Based on a combination of six indicators: housing, poverty, unemployment, education, dependency, and income.

Chart 4. Environmental Attitude by Race & Political Ideology



Source: Ballew, et al., 2021

Greater cohesion among Blacks on environmental concerns in the political realm may be linked to the "double jeopardy" they experience re: environmental consequences as shaped by the racism and inequality that pervades their lives from childhood. As discussed earlier, both race and SES are risk factors for eco-anxiety. Blacks feel the impacts more directly than do Whites. Blacks are also more exposed to environmental consequences in terms of frequency and severity, making them more vulnerable (Ballew, et al., 2021). Their housing tends to be older and lower quality, and more than two-thirds reside within a 30-minute drive of high-pollution coal plants (Elias, et al., 2019; Fields, 2016). Their finances are tight. For example, in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago, per capita income is less than $21,000 and more than half of families experience a severe housing burden, with more than one-third of their income earmarked for housing (Chicago Department of Public Health, 2021). Finally, health is compromised. In Chicago, 17 percent of Black children suffer from asthma. These children are, compared to White children, 2 times more likely to require extended medical intervention and 4 times more likely to die (Fields, 2016). Physicians caring for Black patients are concerned: 88 percent point to increases in chronic disease exacerbated by air pollution and 75 percent to increases in heat-related maladies due to global warming. Nine in ten want to see more money invested in

prevention of eco-related chronic health issues, and 40 percent, in preventative mental health programs targeting issues like eco-anxiety (Sarfaty, et al., 2014).

Culturally Relevant Considerations for Prevention Initiatives

Developing prevention programs that are culturally relevant helps ensure participation and engagement, which in turn helps improve retention and reduce attrition. Cultural relevance is particularly important for prevention programs with public policy implications (Reese and Vera, 2007).

One potential cultural consideration is the engagement of the church community in developing (for example) a psycho-educational program on eco-anxiety. This group counseling effort would be structured jointly by lay clergy, young adults, and adolescents. While Black young adults (Generation Z), are less engaged in religion than their parents or grandparents, a majority (56%) still attend church regularly and even those unaffiliated acknowledge the role of the church in the Black community and feel it either has a good amount of influence (43%) or should have more (35%). Thus, the church continues to play an important role in the lives of Black Youth (Pew Research Center, 2021) and can potentially, play a pivotal role in helping to develop and execute an eco-anxiety prevention program.

A second cultural consideration is the inclusion of all voices in program development: liberal and conservative. Given the narrower gap in the Black community between political ideologies regarding attitudes toward global warming and pro-environmental behavior, it is productive for grassroots efforts to “cross the aisle” for maximum impact. Engaging local politicians will help legitimize the collective nature of any community organizing effort focused on climate control / eco-anxiety, helping to ensure a favorable outcome and providing an opportunity for young people to gain a successful environmental voice with a foothold in public

policy. Broader benefits also may ensue. While Black youth are less likely than White youth to engage in political and civic activities such as voting (15% vs. 23%) or petitioning (9% vs. 19%), due to lack of information, they are twice as likely to aspire to a career in politics (CIRCLE, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

Many ethical issues must be addressed in developing an eco-anxiety prevention program in the western I-290 corridor that encompasses Oak Park, Illinois and the Austin neighborhood of Chicago. One critical issue is obtaining informed consent to participate in psychoeducation and/or a community resilience initiative (section A.2.a, ACA, 2014). This may be a challenge for younger adolescents under 18 as parental consent will be required. Review and discussion of the informed consent documents will require language that is both age- and culturally-appropriate (section A.2.c, ACA, 2014). Another critical issue is avoiding bias and harm by not imposing personal values. I am passionate about environmental issues but need to take care to avoid imprinting my beliefs and attitudes on young people considering and/or involved in the program. This involves making sure to listen and not advise, taking cues from my clients (section A.4.b., ACA, 2014). Related to this, I may find myself drawn to developing personal friendships and acquaintances with some participants, based on shared experiences and common interests. Maintaining a professional stance will be required, which involves setting ground rules and thresholds (section A.6, ACA, 2014).

Another ethical focus is proper boundaries of competence (section C.2.a). Some prevention techniques I am suggesting, such as community organizing, are new to me. Coordinating these efforts with an experienced colleague and discussing emerging concerns with other licensed mental health professionals are two potential ethical approaches to gaining

competence (ACA, 2014). A related focus is proper development of relationships with other professionals, such as lay clergy and local politicians that results in beneficial and productive outcomes for the young adult participants (section D1, ACA, 2014).

Finally, monitoring program effectiveness (section C.2.b) is also important and should be considered from both an individual mental health standpoint and a community benefit standpoint. Evaluation is particularly important for any multicultural prevention programs, as lack of such has been a challenge in the past (Reese and Vera, 2007).

PART 5: ADVOCACY

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Advocacy is defined as speaking / acting in collaboration with or on behalf of a specific target population or sub-group to promote and support change that will have a positive impact on this constituency (Murray and Crowe, 2016). Advocacy can occur at four levels: individual (client or person), institution (distinct organizations, each with a defined societal role, such as schools), community (values, standards and ways of being across a broader geographic space) and public policy (federal, state, or local legal and governing bodies) (Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, 2015). In this section, I will examine potential barriers to eco-anxiety awareness and prevention at the institutional, community, and public policy levels, then recommend one advocacy approach at each of these three levels.

Potential Barriers to Eco-anxiety Awareness & Prevention

As the target population for my project is young adults in their mid-late teens and early 20s, a natural institutional focus for support and connections is local high schools and community colleges. Two potential institutional barriers are acess to these schools and understanding the role / importance of climate change in their curriculum. Since moving to Oak

Park 5 years ago, I have had no contact with the local school system. While I moved to the community with a high school-aged child, she did not attend local schools and made no local friends. Frankly, the onslaught of the COVID pandemic soon after exacerbated the barrier by making it difficult to build any connections in my new community, personal or professional. I am basically an outsider with no personal historical or current connection to faculty, students, or standard operating procedures in local pedagogy.

At the community level, a potential barrier is learning the true norms, values, and regulations embedded in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago and how (or if) they relate to eco-anxiety. This neighborhood, directly adjacent to Oak Park along the I-290 corridor poses a potential racial and SES barrier as the neighborhood is 90 percent Black and among the poorest in the city. Between 1960 and 1990, the landscape shifted dramatically due to White flight (from 99.8% White in 1960 to 86% Black in 1990). Austin, once solid-middle class still struggles with high unemployment and poverty, loss of commercial development and economic opportunity, and housing disinvestment (Encyclopedia of Chicago, n. d.). As a White person, developing the rapport and trust required to understand community values, norms, and regulations, a precursor to successful advocacy (Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, 2015) may be difficult.

At the public policy level, a potential barrier to eco-anxiety awareness and prevention is understanding the nature of the political process in the City and its neighborhoods and how best to influence it. Chicago is notorious for its "pyramid" Machine-style politics at a scale and magnitude far out-stripping other American cities (BBC News, 2010). Chicago politics is complex and multi-faceted, often more focused on *who* you know than *what* you know. While Chicago has made great strides on some environmental issues (such as reducing levels of PM2),

eco-anxiety is over-shadowed by other important “here now” issues like gun violence, police reform, public transit deficits, and immigrant support (Chang, 2023; County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2020).

Advocacy Actions to Address Eco-anxiety Awareness & Prevention

At the institutional level, one advocacy effort is to collaborate with St. Martins, a Black church on the western side of the Austin neighborhood, to examine, through action research and open dialogue, the role / experience of climate change and eco-anxiety on local Black youth. St. Martins is headed by a Black vicar and features gospel-style services. Built on the ashes of White flight, it welcomes all races and ethnicities. This advocacy action may be effective because it offers supportive, neutral ground where Blacks and Whites can work together, share, and grow. It offers a empowering first step that, after applying lessons learned, can be adapted and rolled out in other parts of Austin as well as in Oak Park, perhaps in other venues, such as schools.

At the community level, one advocacy effort is to create a “Youth Speaks Out” social media campaign focused on global warming, climate change, and eco-anxiety. The goal of this effort is to share some of the learnings, stories, opinions and ideas gleaned from the extended action research conducted at the institutional level. This environmental voice for youth in the I-290 corridor can help build bridges to local public environmental groups, such as the Nature Conservancy and the Illinois Environmental Council. This advocacy action may be effective because it is a nascent collective effort, which research has shown is more effective than individual efforts (Schwartz et al, 2023). Moreover, social media is an important communication channel for youth: 95 percent have access to a smart phone and 50 to 75 percent say they use YouTube, TikTok, and/or Instagram at least once a day (Pew Research, 2022). Black youth are

even more wired in that they are 3 to 5 times more likely than Whites to use these three social media apps almost constantly (Pew Research Center, 2022).

At the public policy level, one advocacy effort is to work on behalf of youth in the I-290 corridor to build relationships with organizations in Illinois that shape environmental laws and policies at the state and local levels. Such organizations include the Illinois EPA, which supports environmental justice, and the Illinois Environmental Council. These organizations may, in turn, provide personnel, funding/grants, or other resources to assist with eco-friendly community organizing efforts based on Steps for Resilience or other programs. This advocacy action may be effective because it provides a foundation for creating an empowering collective grassroots effort through which real changes can be initiated. Such programs have been shown to be effective in reducing eco-anxiety (Schwartz et al., 2023).

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