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Exploring Climate Anxiety, Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction in Life in relation with Experiential Avoidance among Young Adults

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Abstract

Experiential avoidance (EA) as a phenomenon is described as a psychological reluctance to pursue certain experiences, be it physical circumstances, thoughts, feelings, memories or behaviour. Instead one builds a mental barrier against them. Substantial amounts of studies have linked experiential avoidance to varied issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression or behavioural disorders. The present study examined the relationship between Experiential avoidance, Climate anxiety, Self-efficacy and Satisfaction with life. The sample involved 129 female young adults in the age group 18 to 25 years. 'Acceptance and Action Questionnaire Second Version' (Bond et al., 2011), 'Hogg Climate Anxiety Scale' (Hogg et al., 2024), 'General Self-Efficacy Short Scale–3' (Doll et al., 2021) and 'Satisfaction with Life Scale' (Diener et al., 1985) were used to assess the psychological correlates of Experiential Avoidance. t-Tests and Pearson product moment analysis were conducted to explore the comparison of groups and links amongst the variables. The results presented significant disparity between the EA group and Non-EA group on Climate anxiety and Satisfaction with life. The present study portrayed the association of Experiential avoidance with Climate anxiety and Satisfaction with life. These findings could facilitate clinical evaluation, outreach provision and ward off under-recognition or poor understanding of features, predictors, and risk factors of EA in Indian youth and create awareness regarding the hex of Climate anxiety.

Keywords: experiential avoidance, climate anxiety, self-efficacy and satisfaction in life

Introduction:

Hayes et al., (1996) defines Experiential avoidance (EA) as "the phenomenon that occurs when a person is unwilling to remain in contact with particular private experiences and takes steps to alter the form or frequency of these events and the contexts that occasion them". It involves the rejection of awareness of mostly negative subjective experiences, which in the longer run could lead to development as well as maintenance of psychological maladjustments (Fernández-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Also, considered to be a trans-diagnostic facet, it is co-connected with a variety of psychological states, like mood disorders (Akbari et al., 2022), obsessive-compulsive and addictive disorders (Den Ouden et al., 2020). The same is often

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termed as psychological inflexibility, a concept under framework of 'Acceptance and Commitment Therapy' (ACT) (Hayes et al., 2006) and it bifurcates into: i) avoiding aversive personal experiences, be it events, emotions, memories, thoughts or actions and ii) to act in order to modify/avoid these very experiences. Clinically, in adults, Spinhoven et al., (2014) found a strong positive relationship between EA and depression, especially females suffering from affective disorders. Salazar et al. (2025) found EA scores to be significantly higher in women in comparison to men.

Experiential avoidance is constructed and maintained through negative reinforcement, as subjective experiences are connected to appraisals of threat and harm (Hayes et al., 1996). Thus, EA is a mold of mental avoidance conditioning, and manifests as an inclination to engage in avoidance strategies in lieu of stressful circumstances, along with negative psychological results (Penley et al, 2002). Psychological inflexibility ends up being one of the most salient psychological facets as the individual may spend excessive time and effort in managing or struggling with unwanted events. As a result, the individual becomes less likely to maintain worthwhile approach-oriented experiences. Furthermore, the short-term relief of this avoidance coping can have deprecating implications in the longer run and can contribute to significant psychopathy by heightening ones' sensitivity to situations and increasing susceptibility to apprehensions (Karekla et al., 2004). Moreover, it can lead to biased interpretations by forming memory biases (Lavy & van den Hout, 1994). Thus, it leads to intense emotional reactions and decreased tolerance. Strahan et al., (2011) propose that females indulge in either behavioural avoidance or venting out negative thoughts whereas for males EA might manifest as substance use.

Climate change, due to its progressively menacing nature, has become a cause of imminent global concern. The term Climate anxiety is used to address the anxiety related to today's ecological problems such as deforestation, global warming, pollution and biodiversity loss. Over the years, climate anxiety has emerged as a significant concern for one's mental health (Clayton, 2020). Multiple studies have documented that extreme weather conditions related to climate change, such as wildfires, heat waves, oil-spilling, droughts or heavy rainfall, are positively elevated to psychological distress, (Matthews et al., 2025; Mitchell et al., 2024) leading to "climate anxiety". Van Valkengoed et al., (2023) proposed it to be the "persistent anxiety (apprehensiveness) and worry about climate change, that is difficult to control, and associated with…emotional, cognitive, physiological, and behavioural indicators". Thus, it can be explored as persistent and overwhelming worry about climate change which can have psychological repercussions. In a study on young adults by Hickman et al., (2021), found 60% of participants to be "very" or "extremely" anxious about climate change. Boluda-Verdú et al. also suggested a negative connection between eco-anxiety and mental well-being outcomes among youth. Clayton and Karazsia (2020) did not find any significant differences based on gender, however, Larionow et al. (2022) and found climate anxiety to be higher among females. In a study by Wullenkord et al., (2021) while men expressed denial of climate guilt and rationalization, women reported to indulge in avoidance.

As per the social cognitive theory, an individual's confidence in their own competence in achieving something despite circumstances is termed as Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). It is a

form of self-concept, which has been extensively researched in the fields of health, education and social cognition. Higher amounts of self-efficacy has been linked to a broad array of positive outcomes, capacities along with overt and covert behavioural repertoire (Hunsu et al., 2023; Panadero et al., 2017). Gerdan and Gürlük (2025) found that the relation between self-efficacy and other psychological symptoms is fully mediated by experiential avoidance. Another study by Michalova et al., (2021) on asthmatics also supported negative relations between self-efficacy and experiential avoidance. A study done on students, reported that those high on psychological inflexibility, score lower on college self-efficacy (Jeffords et al., 2020).

Life satisfaction is a subjective construct. It contributes as a major facet of social and subjective well-being. Being satisfied, represents one's aggregate evaluation of their experiences, ambitions and achievements (Diener et al., 1985). Based on the comparison of perceived reality and of personal reckonings, it is evenly regulated by factors like social dealings, physical health, psychological well-being and search for meaning in life (Joshanloo et al., 2019). Higher life satisfaction is linked with positive attitudes and outcomes. Clinically, assessing life satisfaction can help in early screening and monitoring of potential symptoms of psychological distress (Pavot & Diener, 2008). In a study by Roldán Merino et al., (2025), a lower amount of life satisfaction was found to be significantly linked with climate anxiety, especially with subscales- affective and behavioural symptoms. In the very case of experiential avoidance, a high score was related to lower amounts of satisfaction with life (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). Studies suggest psychological inflexibility to be a key risk factor for the latter (Valdivia-Salas et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2016).

This study aims to probe Experiential Avoidance among young female adults, specifically examining the relationships between Climate anxiety, Self-efficacy, and Satisfaction with life. For many young adults, this very time of life is marred by difficult transitioning, stress and apprehensions regarding themselves, their environment and future. Especially, in today's world, climate anxiety ends up being an ever looming threat to one's physical as well as mental health. With more research focusing on emotional and psychological effects of the same, work such as this one may enable one to raise awareness at both individual as well as societal levels. Also, the findings can promote and guide policies and interventions to support the mental well-being of youngsters in the times of future environmental problems. Experiential avoidance may hamper one's actual experiences and feelings regarding such problems and end up mitigating concern regarding this very issue. Hence, by studying a sub-continental sample, especially females who are among the vulnerable, the present study aspires to contribute in broadening the body of literature regarding experiential avoidance, climate anxiety, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction related to youth.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the relationship of Experiential Avoidance with Climate Anxiety, Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction with Life among young adults.
- To assess the differences between the Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Non-Experiential Avoidance (Non-EA) group among young adults.

Hypotheses of the Study:

- It was expected that Experiential Avoidance will be positively related to Climate Anxiety, while it will be negatively related to Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction with Life.
- It was expected that there would be significant differences between the Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Non-Experiential Avoidance (Non-EA) group in relation with their psychological correlates, namely, Climate Anxiety, Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction with Life among young adults.

METHOD

Participants:

The sample involved 129 female young adults, from the age range of 18 to 25 years, selected randomly from the Private and Government institutions of Education within the Tricity (Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali) area.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- Only female participants
- Participants from the age group of 18 to 25 years.
- Participants with any chronic psychiatric or physical disability/visual or auditory impairment will be excluded.

Table 1

Shows the Descriptive Analysis on the Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Total Sample

	Frequency	*Percentage*
Educational Qualification		
12th Pass	23	17.8%
Under-Graduate	55	42.6%
Graduate	13	10.1%
Post-Graduate	38	29.5%
Field of Study		
Arts	82	63.6%
Sciences	29	22.5%
Commerce	10	7.8%
Others	8	6.2%
Current Residence		

Home	80	62%
Hostel/PG/Rented accommodation	49	38%
Type of family		
Joint family	42	32.6%
Nuclear family	87	67.4%
Relationship Status		
Yes	24	18.6%
No	105	81.4%
Father's educational qualification		
Post-Graduation	55	42.6%
Graduation	55	42.6%
Below Graduation	19	14.7%
Mother's educational qualification		
Post-Graduation	56	43.4%
Graduation	53	41.1%
Below Graduation	20	15.5%

Measures:

Socio-demographic Questionnaire: This socio-demographic questionnaire was prepared to gather information regarding academic qualification, field of study, current residence, type of family, relationship status and parents' qualifications.

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire Second Version (AAQ-II) (Bond et al., 2011) consisting 7 items, assessing experiential avoidance or psychological inflexibility, was used. The scores range from 7 to 49. Those scoring 24 or below are not considered as experiencing significant psychological issues (Berta-Otero et al., 2022). Higher scores exhibit greater experiential avoidance. Bond et al. (2011) present that AAQ II has a decent internal consistency of .88.

Hogg Climate Anxiety Scale (HCAS) (Hogg et al., 2024) is a modified version of the Hogg Eco-Anxiety Scale (HEAS) (Hogg et al. 2021). It involves 13 items, measuring Climate anxiety experienced by the participants in the last 2 weeks. It uses a 4-point rating scale- "0=not at all", "1=several of the days", "2=over half the days" and "3=nearly every day'. The HCAS explores 4 dimensions namely, "affective symptoms", "rumination", "behavioural symptoms" and

anxiety "personal impact" on the environment. The items were preceded by this very statement, "Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems, when thinking about climate change?". As per psychometric findings, HCAS possesses decent internal consistency (0.936), test–retest reliability (0.716) and split-half reliability (0.869) (Chen et al., 2025).

The General Self-Efficacy Short Scale–3 (GSE-3) by (Doll et al., 2021) examines one's aggregate confidence in one's abilities and competence. The GSE-3 is the English-language adaptation of the German "Allgemeine Selbstwirksamkeit Kurzskala" Scale (ASKU) by Beierlein et al., (2014). GSE-3 is an economical measure with a 5 point rating scale ranging from "1 =do not agree at all" to "5 =completely agree". Moreover, it has a unidimensional structure with reliability up to .92 (Doll et al., 2021).

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) consists of 5 items by Diener et al. (1985), answered on a 5 point likert scale, "1=Strongly agree', "2= Agree", "3= Neither agree nor disagree", "4= Disagree" and "5=Strongly disagree'. The total score is the average of all the item scores. Higher scores depict greater life satisfaction. Sabatini and Turner (2026), in their study found Cronbach's α for the same to be .84.

Procedure:

The questionnaires were sent to the respondents in the form of a Google form through WhatsApp and e-mail. Also, they were requested to carefully follow the instructions for the same. Confidentiality of their responses and information was assured.

Statistical Analysis:

In lieu of the aforementioned objectives of the study, the respondents were administered all the scales, at once. The scoring of these questionnaires were done in accordance to the instructions provided in their respective manuals. The means and standard deviation of the total sample were calculated as an ingredient of the descriptive analysis. T-tests and correlation analysis was done to delve into the disparity and associations amongst the groups and psychological variables.

RESULTS

The primary aim of the study was to study the relationship of Experiential Avoidance with Climate Anxiety, Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction with Life among young adults. The secondary aim was to explore the dissimilarities between the Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Non-Experiential Avoidance (Non-EA) group among young adults.

Table 2

Shows the means, standard deviations and t-ratios of the Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Non-Experiential Avoidance (Non-EA) group among young adults.

	EA Group (N=79)	**Non-EA Group (N=50)**	

Variables	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	t-ratios
Affective symptoms	7.39 ± 4.73	3.66 ± 3.45	**4.819****
Rumination	2.83 ± 2.31	1.5 ± 2.21	**3.243****
Behavioural symptoms	3.40 ± 2.47	1.66 ± 1.64	**4.405****
Personal impact	3.22 ± 2.44	1.68 ± 2.08	**3.704****
Climate anxiety	16.86 ± 9.81	8.5 ± 7.28	**5.183****
Self-efficacy	3.51 ± 0.82	3.8 ± 0.77	-1.928
Satisfaction with Life	18.18 ± 6.57	23.1 ± 5.97	**-4.279****

Note: *Value of Correlation significant at 0.05 level =1.98

**Value of Correlation significant at 0.01 level=2.62

Table 2 shows the comparative analysis between Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Non-Experiential Avoidance (Non-EA) group in relation to the psychological variables namely, climate anxiety, self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. Intriguingly, the following t-ratios were found to be significant: the EA group scored higher than the Non-EA group on Affective symptoms (t=4.819, p<.01), Rumination (t=3.243, p<.01), Behavioural symptoms (t=4.405, p<.01), Personal impact (t=3.704, p<.01) and Total Climate Anxiety (t=5.183, p<.01). The Non-EA group scored higher than the EA group on Satisfaction with Life (t=-4.279, p<.01).

Table 3

Shows the Correlational Analysis of Experiential Avoidance, Climate Anxiety, Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction with Life.

	Experiential avoidance	Affective symptoms	Rumination	Behavioural symptoms	Personal impact	Climate anxiety	Self-efficacy	Satisfaction with life
Experiential avoidance	1	**0.395****	**0.321****	**0.346****	**0.326****	**0.429****	-0.145	**-0.402****
Affective symptoms	**0.395****	1	**0.578****	**0.563****	**0.647****	**0.909****	**-0.303****	**-0.354****

Rumination	**0.321****	**0.578****	1	**0.407****	**0.670****	**0.779****	-0.169	-0.121
Behavioural symptoms	**0.346****	**0.563****	**0.407****	1	**0.487****	**0.726****	-0.159	**-0.257***
Personal impact	**0.326****	**0.647****	**0.670****	**0.487****	1	**0.833****	**-0.182***	-0.153
Climate anxiety	**0.429****	**0.909****	**0.779****	**0.726****	**0.833****	1	**-0.268***	**-0.296****
Self-efficacy	-0.145	**-0.303****	-0.169	-0.159	**-0.182***	**-0.268****	1	**0.216***
Satisfaction with life	**-0.402****	**-0.354****	-0.121	**-0.257****	-0.153	**-0.296****	**0.216***	1

Note: *Value of Correlation significant at 0.05 level =0.174

**Value of Correlation significant at 0.01 level=0.228

Table 3 shows the bivariate correlational analysis between Experiential Avoidance and its psychological correlates namely, Climate Anxiety and Satisfaction with Life. Findings illuminate that Experiential Avoidance was positively and significantly related to all subscales of Climate anxiety- Affective symptoms (r=0.395, p<.01), Rumination (t=0.321, p<.01), Behavioural symptoms (r=0.346, p<.01), Personal impact (r=0.326, p<.01) and Total Climate Anxiety (r=0.429, p<.01). However, it was negatively related to Satisfaction of Life (r=-0.402, p<.01).

Discussion:

Experiential avoidance (EA) alleviates stress for a short while, in the form of rigid avoidance. It manifests as extreme behavioural avoidance, thought suppression and substance use. EA has been found to have a positive relationship with poor psychological health (Vally et al., 2024; Castro et al., 2021). Psychological inflexibility is a mental construct describing individuals' ineffective control over their thoughts, feelings and subjective experiences, to avoid unpleasant overt and covert situations (Uğur et al., 2021). As per neurobiological evidence, harm avoidance is associated with functional and structural irregularities in prefrontal regions of the brain (Zhong et al., 2024). This can further be traced in connection with emotional as well as

executive inefficiency, decreased mental set-shifting capacity and poor cognitive functioning (Grant & Cassidy, 2022). Multiple studies have found that EA and increased susceptibility of burnout, anxiety, suicidal ideation and depression among young adults (Chou et al., 2018; Kroska et al., 2017).

Interestingly, 54.2% of the sample fell into the experientially avoidant category. This highlights the modern way of dealing with climate and self-related distress. A majority of participants were undergrads (42.6%), living at home (62%) in a nuclear family setup (67.4%) and were single (81.4%).

A comparison between Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Non-Experiential Avoidance (Non-EA) group (Table 2) revealed that EA group scored higher than the Non-EA group on Affective symptoms, Rumination, Behavioural symptoms, Personal impact and Total Climate Anxiety, while the Non-EA group scored higher than the EA group on Satisfaction with Life.

Research supports that climate anxiety was related to feelings of worry (Clayton & Karazsia 2020). Some who experience climate anxiety do not immediately experience mental health issues, rather they may continue to gather knowledge of environmental problems (Gunasiri et al. 2022) and actively look for solutions (Heeren et al. 2022). Hogg et al., (2021) found younger adults to be more susceptible to environment related anxiety. According to Desai and Zhang, (2021) women are at a greater risk and burdened from environmental change, due to economic dependence, dearth of education, and cultural roots. Climate distress may be perpetuated by an unsuccessful attempt to suppress climate related apprehensions (Guthrie, 2023). Thus, experiential avoidance may contribute to poor psychological states and likely withdrawal from pro-environmental repertoire. This could also happen at a societal level, as Norgaard (2011) describes how while interviewing residents of a rural Norwegian community, he found respondents avoiding discussions regarding climate change. As a result, contributing to collective denial and a social scenario where this very issue remained unaddressed.

Gori et al. (2023) investigated avoidance in relation to satisfaction with life and found a negative one. MacDonald and Park (2022) found higher levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety to be related to contentment with singlehood, but lower life satisfaction. Higher experiential avoidance was significantly related to lower life quality and social satisfaction but higher levels of anxiety, binge eating and depression (Donahue et al., 2023). In an Indian sample, spiritual intelligence was found to be positively related with satisfaction with life, along with females scoring higher than their male counterparts (Walter et al., 2024).

The correlational matrix reveals a significantly positive relationship of experiential avoidance with climate anxiety and satisfaction with life among the respondents. These findings bridge the gap between psychological factors related to the environment as well as the self. Feather and Williams (2022) higher levels of psychological inflexibility may put one at risk for climate distress, particularly in those who express ecology related concerns. In a broader sense psychological inflexibility may temporarily help one evade the current climatic blight. However, multiple factors are involved in the determination of the same.

Limitations and Future Implications:

This study does cater to the broad expanse of the problem but having used only self-reported data and limited sample of young, general, non-clinical or sub-clinical group of Indian female youngsters hampers the generalizability of the same. Also, this uni-method approach of correlational analysis cannot establish causality between the variables. Further research could incorporate a much diverse sample as well as qualitative form of research to dig a deeper understanding of experiential avoidance. In spite of such impediments, the study contributes significantly to the field of experiential avoidance, climate anxiety, self-efficacy and satisfaction with life among young adults in India.

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