

Young people and climate change in Brazil



This study examines questions of climate change and its impacts in the light of what young Brazilians think, know and do about the issue. It reflects the importance of this group of people in the climate change debate and climate change actions.

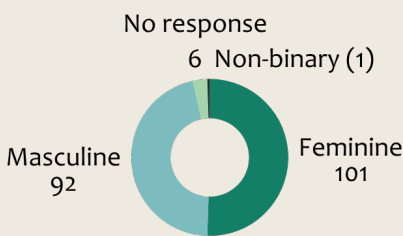
Why the topic is important

We start from the supposition that there is a gap in understanding of young people’s perspective on climate change. An examination of Brazilian and international studies on this topic show that there is a comparatively small number of studies which focus on young people under 18 and which touch on their local experiences of climate change. In addition the studies that exist are conducted remotely and thus are limited to young people with working internet access. They also depend on inviting young people to participate on a climate change survey and are, therefore, likely skewed to youth who are more interested and conversant with the topic.

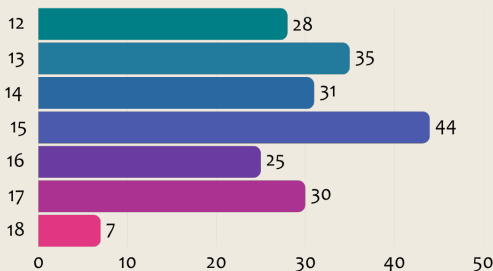
Methodology and profile of youth interviewed

The study employed a quasi-random, purposive sampling method. Interviewers positioned themselves outside schools to select emerging students, aiming to construct a sample representative of the youth population. Diversity was captured across socioeconomic status (by including both public and private institutions), sex, age, and race—the latter categorized by skin color, aligned with standard Brazilian demographic practices. Interviewers reported that very few of the young people approached declined to be interviewed. Each interviewer, one per each of ten cities covering all the five regions of Brazil, conducted the interviews in different parts of their city to achieve within city geographical coverage. The interviews were in person allowing the interviewer to use prompts to increase the qualitative responses. A total of 200 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 were interviewed.

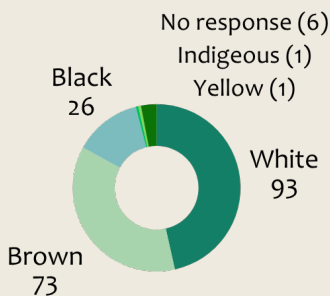
Gender of respondents, according to self identification



Respondents by age, according to self-identification



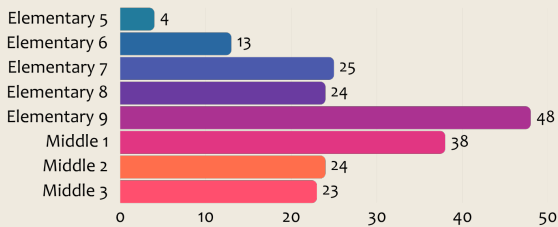
Color of respondents, according to self identification



Distributed across 10 cities, covering all five regions of Brazil



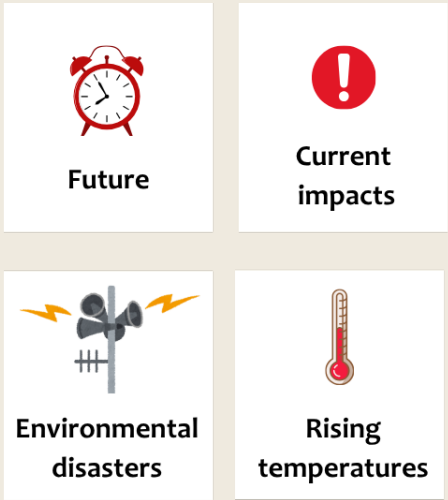
Number of respondents by school grade/year



Findings

The study showed that the young respondents understood the importance of climate change. A large majority, (92.5%) said they knew the phenomenon was important especially as they reflected on their future lives and the upcoming generations.

Most frequently mentioned concerns

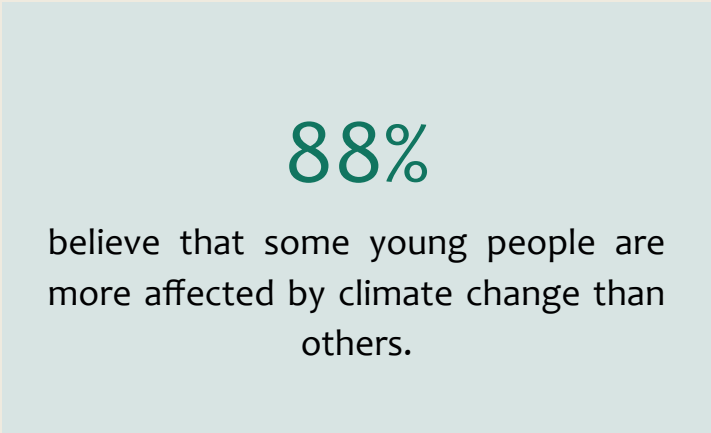


“We are seeing more and more people affected by these natural disasters, losing their homes, their relatives, friends, and their jobs.”

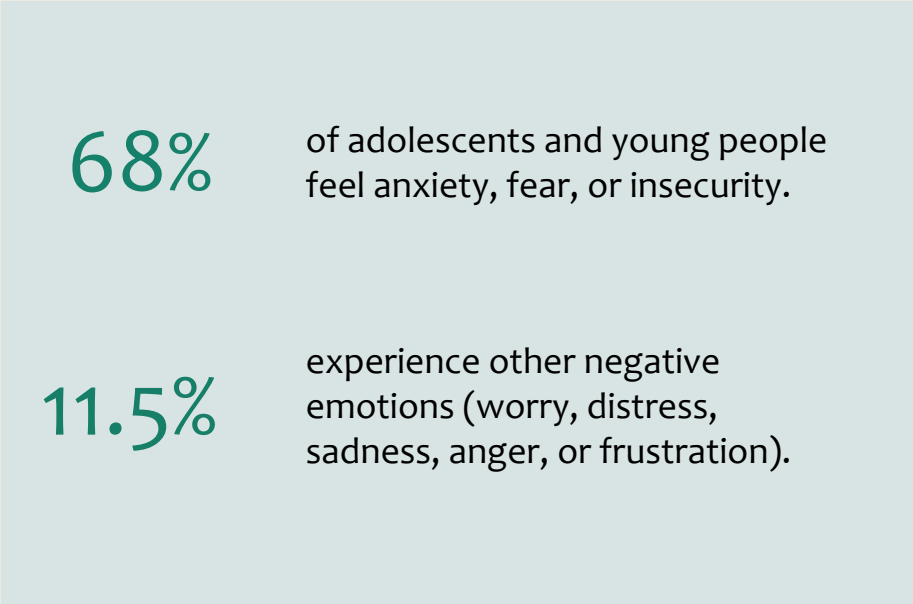
“Because there are people with asthma and other respiratory illnesses who can become even sicker and end up being hospitalized.”

They were, in general, aware of the negative impacts in their communities and 82% said that their neighborhood had been impacted in some way by climate change.

“Well, I’m almost certain that young people with fewer financial resources, who live in less developed neighborhoods, are the ones most affected. When heavy rains occur, landslides can happen, causing them to lose their homes, basically everything they have”



80% of respondents said they felt anxiety, fear, or insecurity when they thought about the topic.



“It causes fear. As I said, it makes me afraid of what the future may bring.”

“What makes me feel a certain sense of insecurity is not knowing whether tomorrow will unfold as expected or whether it will become something completely catastrophic.”

A large majority (88%) thought that action should be taken to reduce the negative impacts of climate change.

Examples of actions mentioned



Forest protection and reforestation



Wildfire prevention



Proper waste management



Reducing pollution and consumption



Raising public awareness



Environmental education

“Increase protection in certain areas, plant more trees, better protect forests because there are so many wildfires. It’s always on the news, which is where I usually hear about it. And if we remove something from nature, we should put it back afterward.”

“I think change has to start with people through talks, education, and explaining the basics. Why shouldn’t we throw trash on the street? That’s how we can gradually contribute more and more.”

Almost all the young people (99.5%) had heard about the topic and 71.5% said they were learning or had learned about the topic at school, the major source of information for them about climate change. However, in general, the respondents showed a very limited knowledge of the topic. When prompted to expand on their initial answers, very few participants could provide further detail or elaborate on the core concepts.

“I’ve learned about it before. It has been mentioned to us, but it’s not a topic that’s discussed very often. We mostly hear about it through the news, which the school encourages us to follow. But at school itself, topics such as wildfires are rarely discussed.”

“Very little. I’ve heard about it only a little in the news. It’s covered quite a lot, but I don’t watch the news very often, so I end up missing a lot of it. Still, I think it’s something I should pay more attention to.”

Most frequently mentioned topics



Global warming



Wildfires



Heavy rainfall



Deforestation



Pollution



Melting glaciers



Flooding



Greenhouse effect

Concerning!

More than 25% of the students surveyed reported that they were not studying, or had never learned about, climate change in school.

Only two participants mentioned COP (and none referred to COP30, which took place in the same year the study was conducted).

While the participants showed a basic awareness of climate change, there were major gaps in their knowledge, especially concerning the dimensions of the crisis and available mitigation strategies. What was most striking was that while 72% said they took individual small actions to help the environment, only 3% said they had connected to collective actions. Some said they would like to participate with others on climate change but that they didn’t know how to.

Examples of actions mentioned



Do not litter



Conserving water and electricity



Proper waste management

“I know my contribution is small, and that I can’t make a huge difference on my own because I don’t have political power or much economic influence. But I do try to separate my waste, avoid using so much plastic, use reusable metal items instead of plastic ones, and do at least what I can.”

“No, I don’t participate, but I’d like to. I just haven’t had many opportunities. I’ve been looking into ways to get involved, but I haven’t participated yet.”

Conclusions

- The young people realized the importance of climate change and were worried about it as they thought about their own futures and those of upcoming generations. They had, however, little knowledge of the details of climate change.
- They understood the negative impacts that climate change had on their lives and their communities as it caused environmental disasters and this provoked in them anxiety, fear and insecurity.
- Schools were the young people's major source of information on climate change but they were a limited source.
- The vast majority of respondents said they had no connection to any collective initiative on climate change. While they said they would like to be involved in group action they didn't know of any groups they could connect to.
- The study showed that it is necessary to promote more understanding of climate change using age appropriate methods and materials so that young people understand the importance of their individual and collective actions to reduce the impacts of the problem. Given this, we at CIESPI underline our commitment to develop and disseminate strategies to stimulate the engagement of children and young people in the debate respecting their perspectives and their right to social participation.

Access the
complete study:



Who we are

The International Center for Study and Research on Children (CIESPI) is a reference and research center associated with the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). Since 1984, it has been dedicated to the development of research and social projects concerning children and youth, their families and communities, in Brazil and internationally. CIESPI-PUC-Rio is a part of diverse networks working with civil society and is a founding partner of the Coalition for Climate, Children and Adolescents (CLICA) working with many groups to defend the rights of current and future children and youth for a clean, safe and sustainable environment. Our staff includes: Irene Rizzini (founder and director), Maria Cristina Bó (executive coordinator), Malcolm Bush (international consultant) and the researchers, Renata Mena Brasil do Couto, Carolina Terra and Mariana Menezes Neumann.

To learn more, access : www.ciespi.org.br.

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