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Individual Perceptions and Climate Change Initiatives

Abstract

The findings from this research suggest that when individuals are concerned with the effects of climate change for their own communities, and believe that various events in their own communities are related to climate events, they are more likely to support climate change initiatives.

Supporting Summary

Environmental sustainability is an important issue, and there are many areas within this broad domain where greater research and understanding is needed. In this research study we focus on individual support for climate change initiatives. Many organizations are in the process of developing or implementing climate change policies and practices to improve environmental sustainability. Regardless of how innovative or effective these climate change initiatives may be, without the support from the individuals who are affected by these changes, it is challenging for these policies and practices to achieve maximum potential. In this study, approximately 2,500 individuals (approximately 60% female and 40% male, average age 65 years), were asked about their understanding and views of climate change both in general, and as it related to their own communities. After controlling for individual demographic variables and personal health, results show that when individuals are more concerned with the effects of climate change on their own communities, and when they believe that various events (e.g., freeze/thaw, soil erosion, damage to water system, loss of power) in their own communities were caused by climate events, they were more likely to support climate change initiatives (e.g., pay to reduce the effects of climate change, receive lower community services to improve the effects of climate change). Just understanding what the meaning of climate change is in general, or understanding the effects of climate change on communities in general was not significantly related to support for climate change initiatives. These findings suggest that it is important to ensure that individuals understand the more personal implications of climate change in an effort to garner support for climate change initiatives.