



The Impact of Climate Anxiety in Family Formation

What Do Young Adults Think about the ‘Climate Baby Dilemma’?

In Celebration for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family

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* In previous months, eight student groups from various European universities across six countries investigated the impact of climate anxiety on family planning as part of their contribution to the 30th anniversary preparations for the International Year of the Family and contributed with background information to this paper. The participants were Raphaël Bompuy (France), Maria Cámara Echevarría (Spain), Valentina Caro Lopez (Spain), Augustin Chassang (France), Briac de Cambourg (France), Klaudia Drągowska (Poland), Marie-Sondès Dumontet (France), Natalia Filipkowska (Poland), Robin Fraiche (France), Miguel García-Nates (Spain), Maria Garnacho Isasi (Spain), Teresa Gerns (Germany), Álvaro Herrero-Tejedor (Spain), Filip Jurczak (Poland), Maciej Kuliś (Poland), Louis Maupetit (France), Zofia Miedzik (Poland), Levente Orémusz (Hungary), Ana Paula Perez Hernández (United Kingdom), Gabriel Perez Ibiricu (Spain), Alberto Prada Diaz-Villabella (Spain), Stefan Pytel (Poland), Rocío Ramos (Spain), Carla Rodriguez Gutiérrez (United Kingdom), Corentin Rouxel (France), Jaime Sanciñena (Spain), Bence Szabó (Hungary), Jakub Touré (Poland), Zoltan Arpad Trencsenyi (Hungary), Zofia Tymińska (Poland), Agathe Vaillant (France), Grégoire Vassy (France), Maria Waszkiewicz (Poland), and Franciszek Wiącek (Poland),

How does climate change affect physical, mental and community health?

Climate impacts



Air pollution



Forest fires



Rising sea level



Temperature increases



Extreme weather phenomena



Droughts



Physical health

- Changes in physical fitness at activity level
- Increase in heat-related episodes
- Rise in allergies
- Increased exposure to waterborne diseases

Mental health

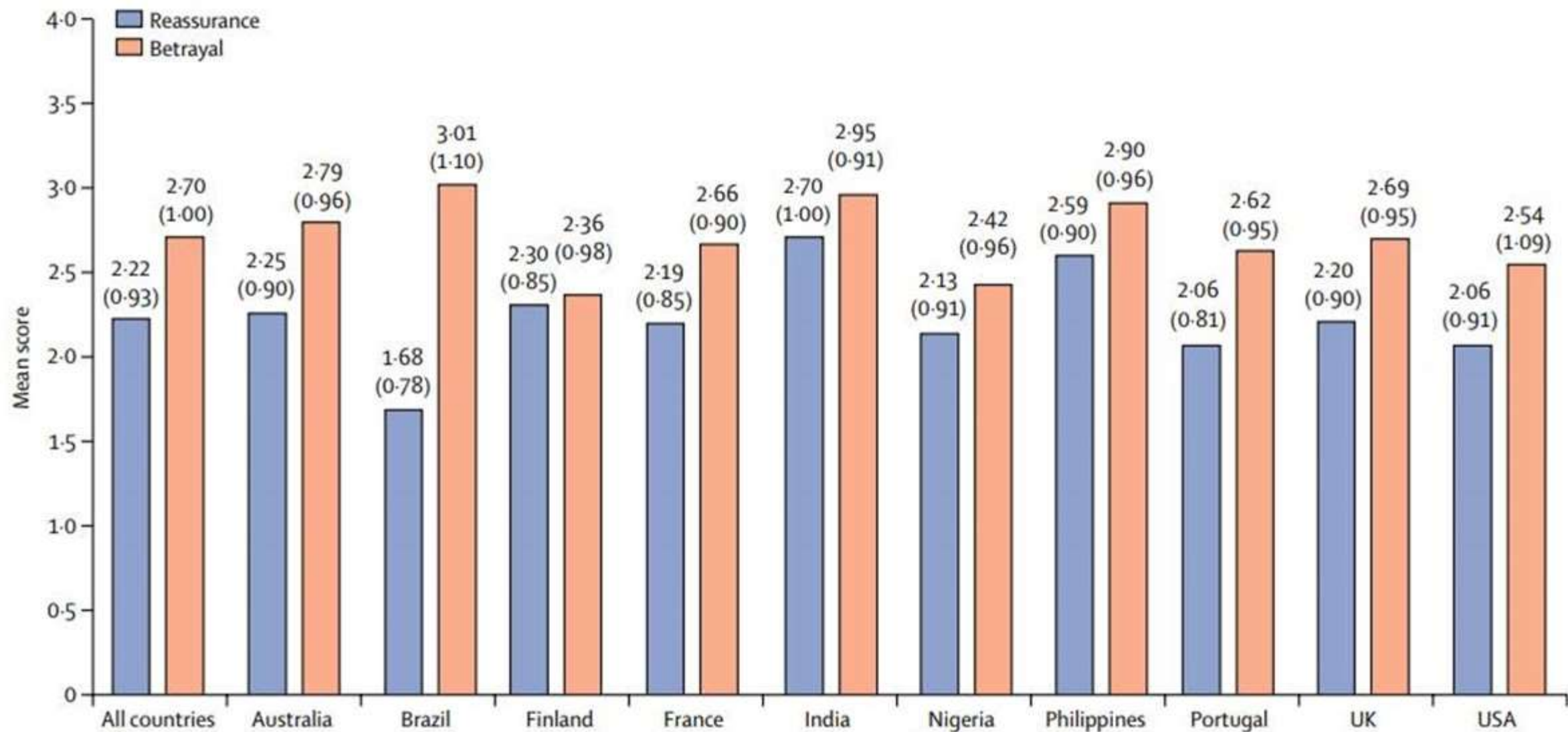
- Stress, anxiety, depression, grief, feeling of loss
- Tension in social relations
- Substance abuse
- Post-traumatic stress disorders

Community health

- Increase in interpersonal aggression
- Increasing violence and crime
- Increased social instability
- Reduction of social cohesion

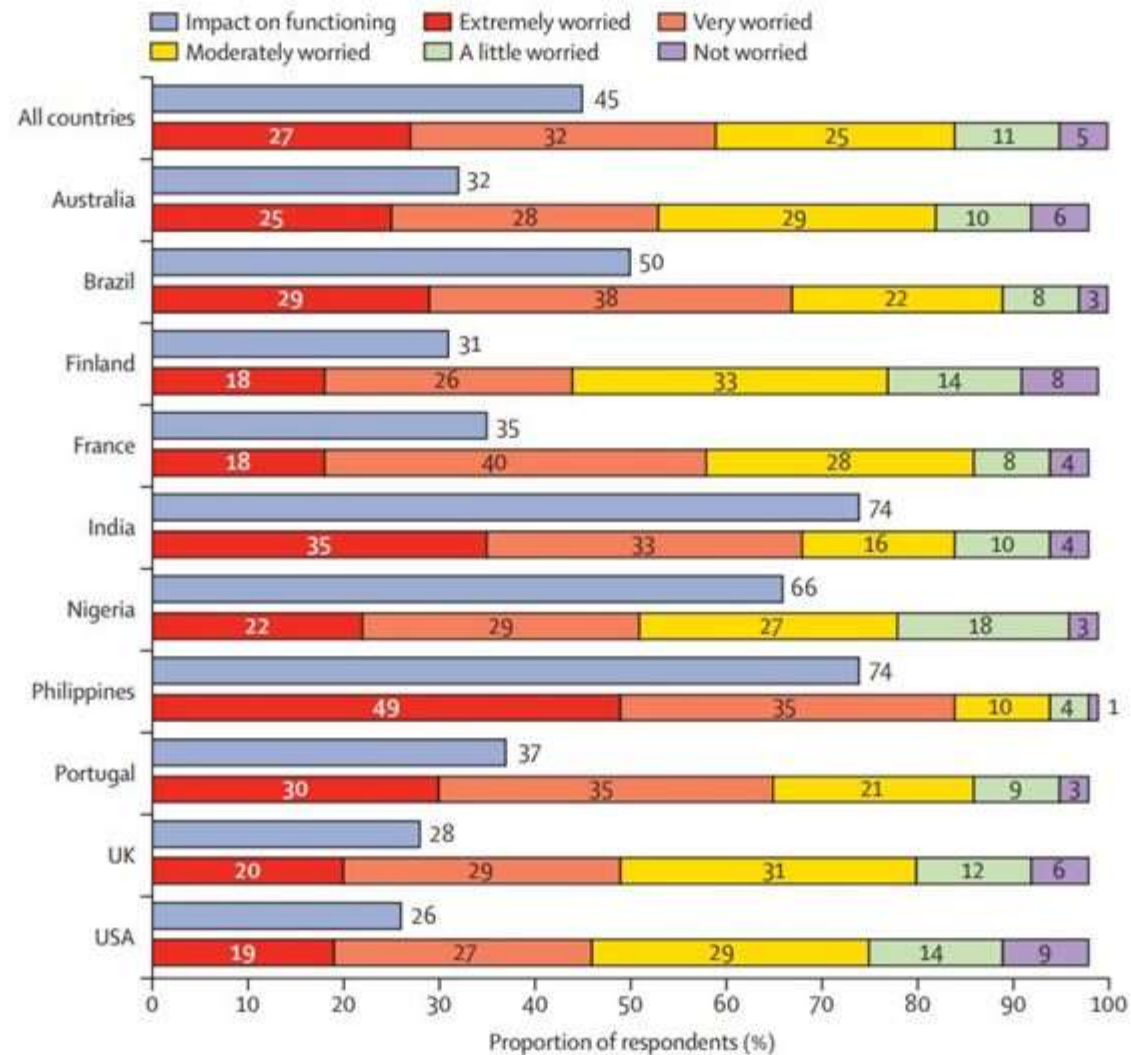
Questions

1. Why is climate change affecting fertility?
2. Where is climate change really promoted?
3. Why is climate change affecting mental health?
4. Will climate change ruin the planet for the next generations?



Negative beliefs about climate change and dismissal - Data are shown for the whole sample (n=10000) and by country (n=1000 per country). The values on the graph are mean (SD).

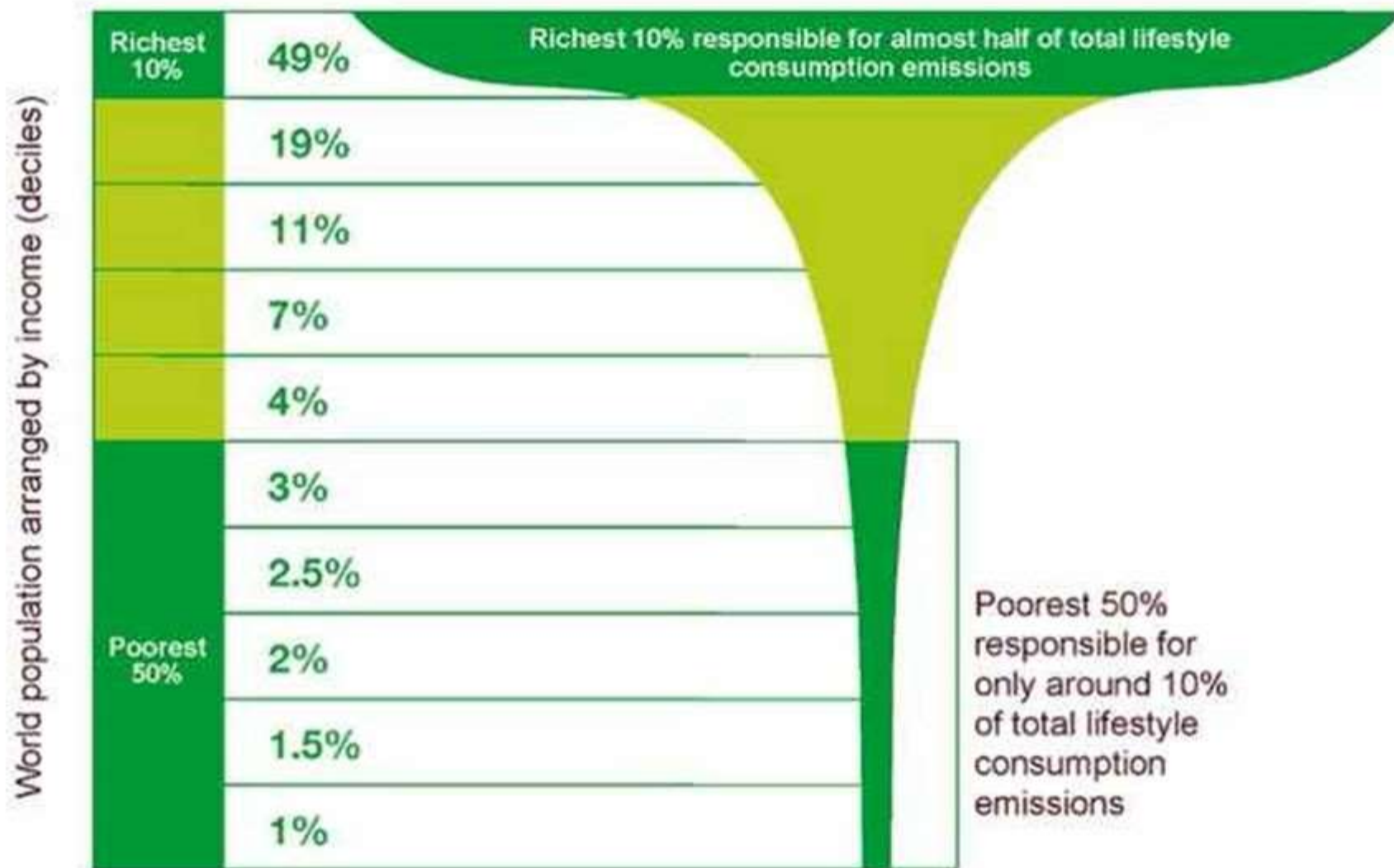
Source: Caroline Hickman, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, R E Lewandowski, Elouise E Mayall, Britt Wray, Catriona Mellor, Lise van Susteren, Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey



Worry about climate change and impact on functioning The graph shows the proportion of the sample reporting a negative impact on functioning from their feelings about climate change and various levels of worry about climate change. Data are shown for the whole sample (n=10 000) and by country (n=1000 per country)

Source: Caroline Hickman, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, R E Lewandowski, Elouise E Mayall, Britt Wray, Catriona Mellor, Lise van Susteren, Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey

Percentage of CO₂ emissions by world population



Source: Oxfam

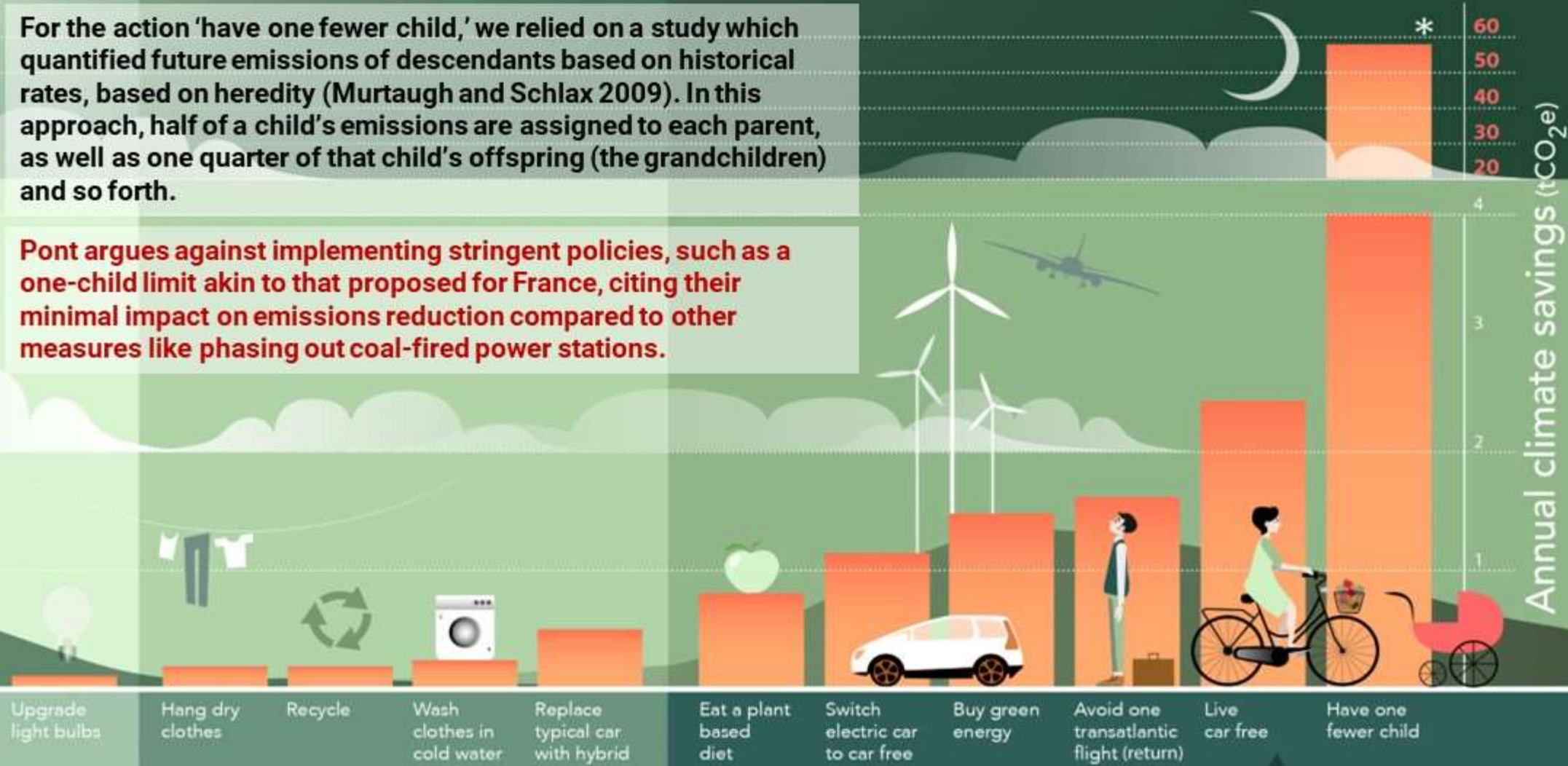
Personal choices to reduce your contribution to climate change

For the action 'have one fewer child,' we relied on a study which quantified future emissions of descendants based on historical rates, based on heredity (Murtaugh and Schlax 2009). In this approach, half of a child's emissions are assigned to each parent, as well as one quarter of that child's offspring (the grandchildren) and so forth.

* Cumulative emissions from descendants; decreases substantially if national emissions decrease.

Pont argues against implementing stringent policies, such as a one-child limit akin to that proposed for France, citing their minimal impact on emissions reduction compared to other measures like phasing out coal-fired power stations.

Average values for developed countries, based on current emissions.



Low Impact

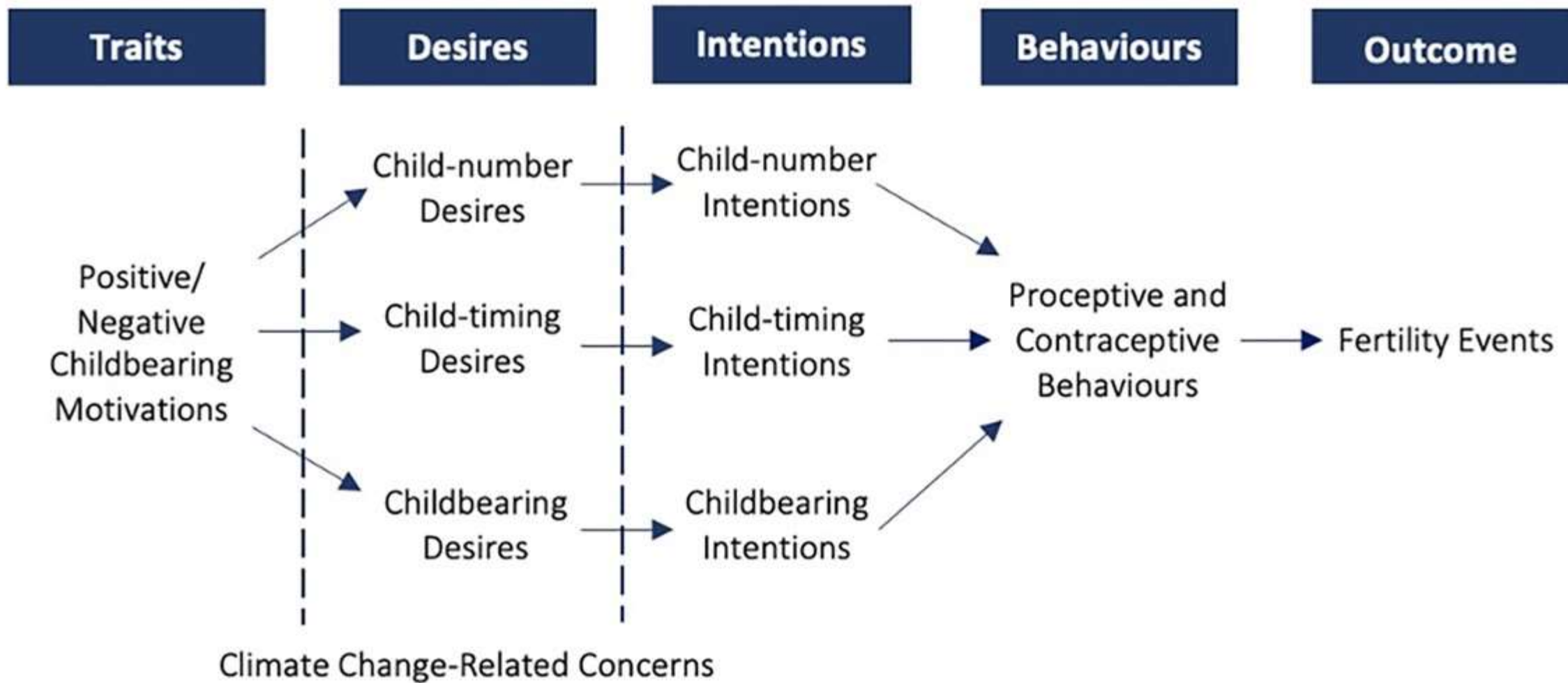
< 0.2 tCO₂e

Moderate Impact

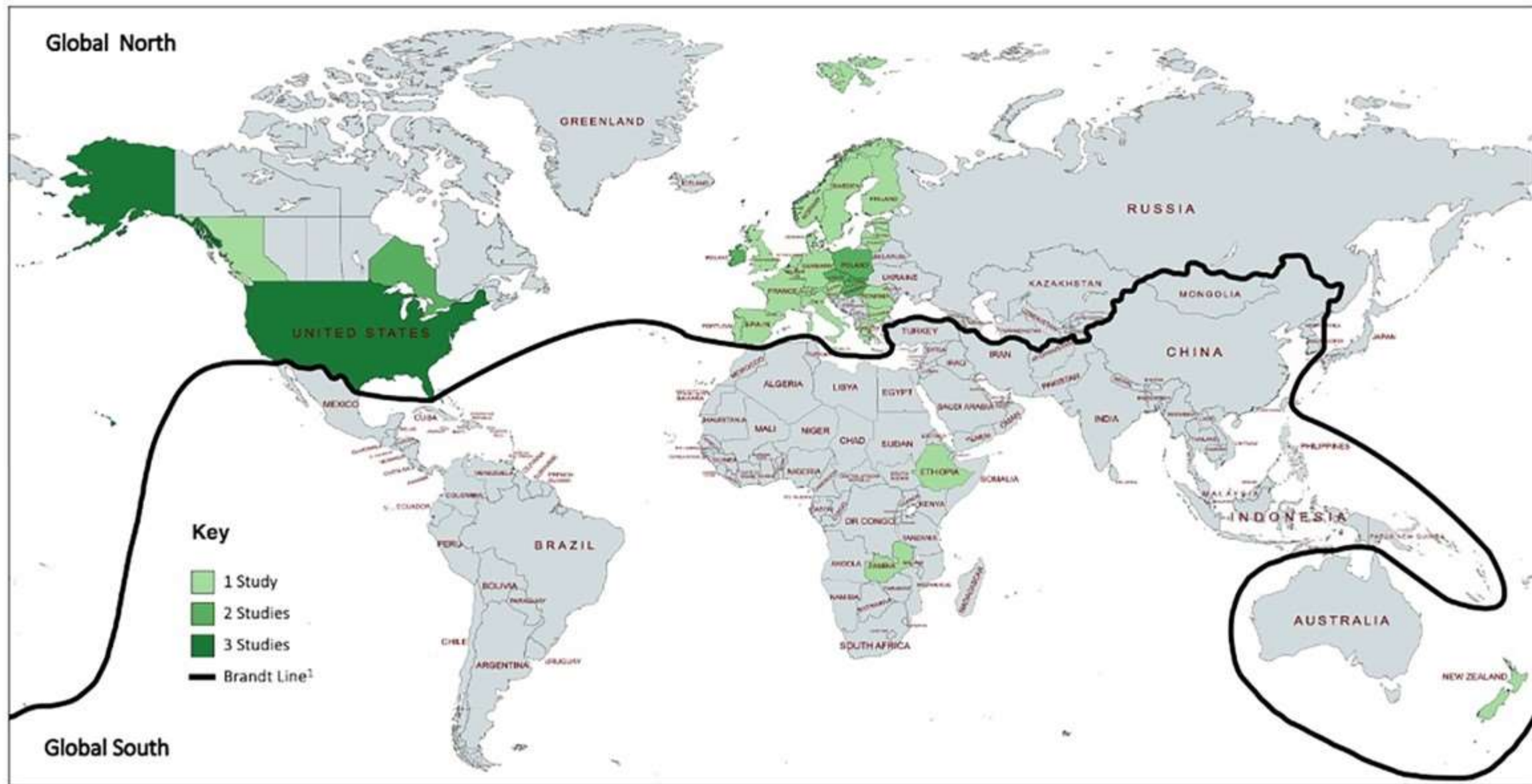
0.8-0.2 tCO₂e

High Impact

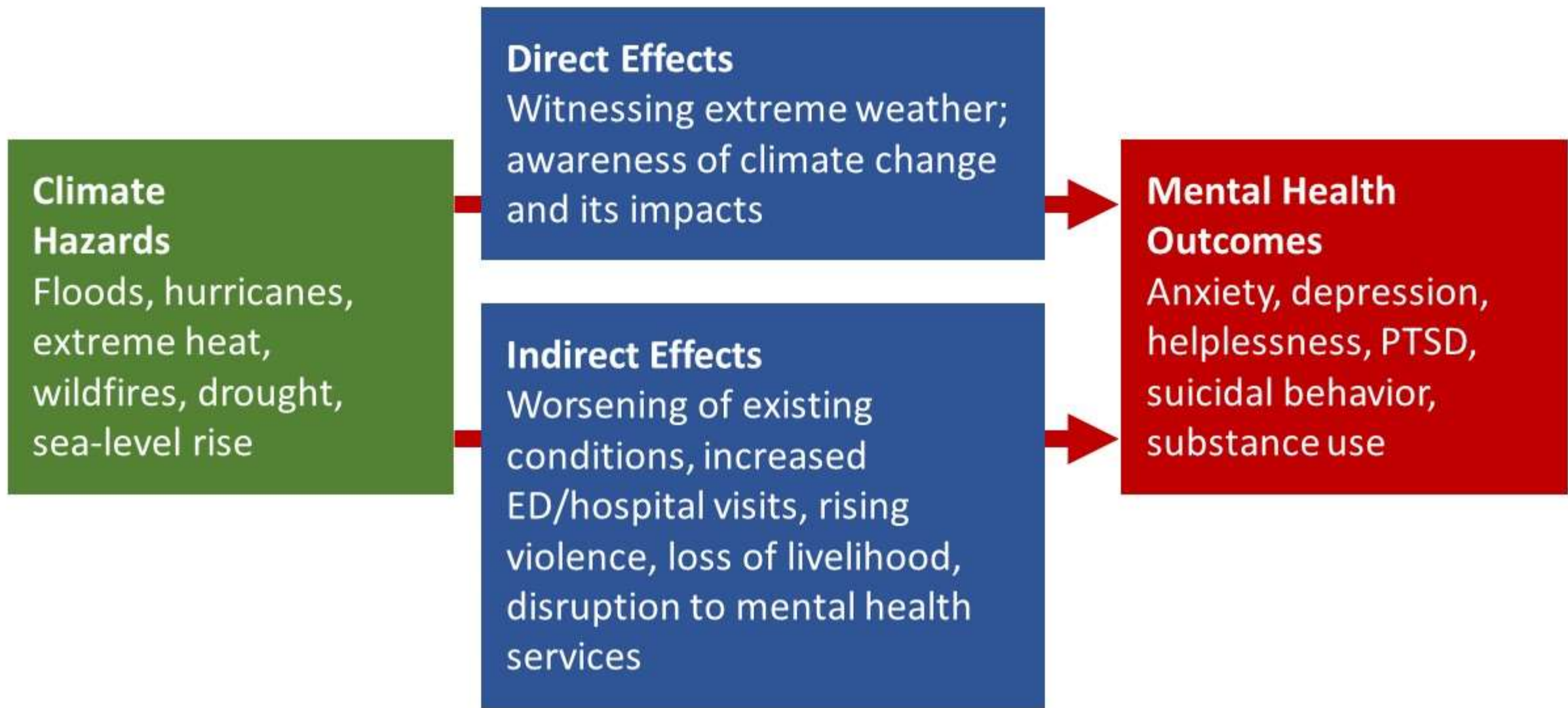
> 0.8 tCO₂e



Source: Dillarstone H, Brown LJ, Flores EC (2023) Climate change, mental health, and reproductive decision-making: A systematic review. PLOS Clim 2(11): e0000236.



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Source: Emily Hough and Nathaniel Counts, "How Climate Change Affects Our Mental Health, and What We Can Do About It" (explainer), Commonwealth Fund, Mar. 29, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.26099/rk6r-ne98>

Conclusions

1. Addressing declining birth rates requires a nuanced understanding of various factors, including eco-anxiety and shifts towards individualism.
2. Climate change is a risk for the future, but the real problem is the fear about it. Dread leads to anxiety.
3. The future for new generations should be again more a challenge than a threat.
4. Potential secondary effects of simplistic approaches must be considered.

Recommendations

More effective policies focusing on promoting family values are needed, countering information overload, and fostering trust in the future:

1. Designing campaigns for genuine sustainable living.
2. Fostering critical thinking.
3. Reframing narratives.
4. Addressing negative psychological impacts.
5. Creating supportive environments for parents.
6. Providing compensations for families reducing their consumption.