Young Adult Perceptions of Climate Change and Natural Resource Sustainability

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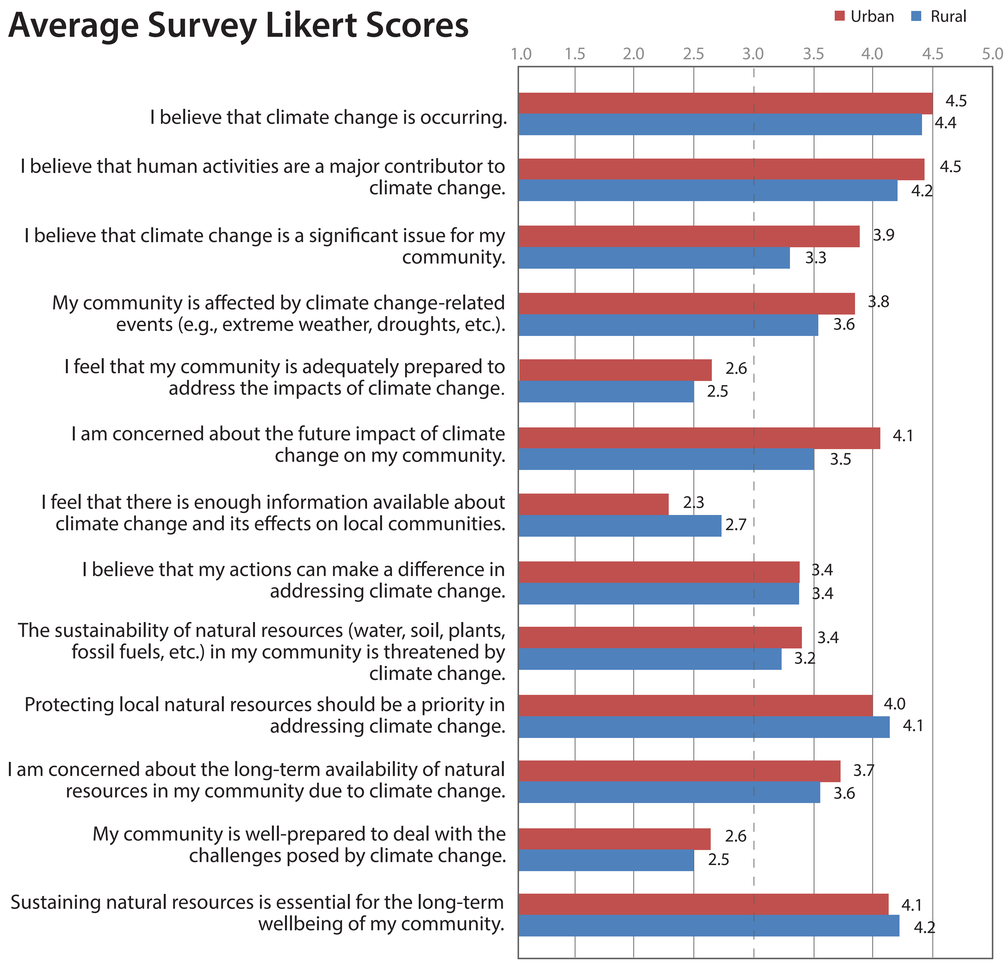
INTRODUCTION

Climate change threatens natural resources, agriculture, and human health and wellbeing in the Midwest (Zhou et al., 2021). Understanding perceptions of climate change and natural resource issues can inform effective outreach, extension, and science communication (Jensen, 2022). Perceptions of young adults have largely been overlooked by past research (Aczel & Makuch, 2023). This study sought to explore how 18–25-year-old, degree-seeking adults in Kansas perceive climate change and natural resource sustainability, and how place of origin affects these perceptions.

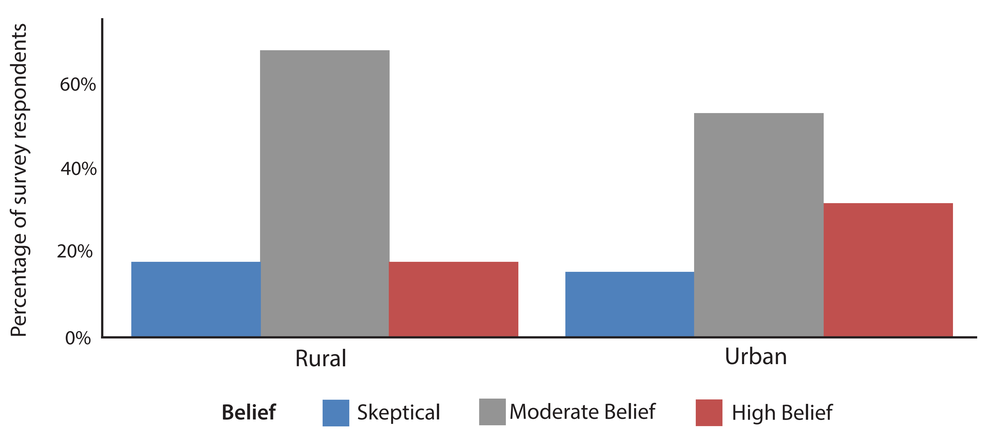
METHODS & ANALYSIS

Data was collected through a survey containing Likert scale statements for issues of climate change and natural resources. Statements were divided into four indexes using principle component analysis. Within each index, responses were compiled to create an index score for each participant. These scores were then placed into four categories using standard deviation as a threshold. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine statistical significance between urban and rural participants.

Average Survey Likert Scores



Index 1: Climate Change Perceptions and Beliefs



RESULTS

- Kansan young adults perceive climate change as a threat to community wellbeing and local natural resources.
- Many feel communities aren't prepared to address climate change impacts, and that current information about these impacts is inadequate.
- Rural residents are less likely to have strong beliefs about climate change issues.

DISCUSSION

Rural residents may lean toward moderate beliefs about climate change for several reasons, including limited direct experience with climate change impacts and stronger perceptions of rural resilience.

Perceptions of preparedness and information inadequacies may deter young adults from adopting mitigation strategies. These perceptions, as well as concern for community wellbeing and natural resource sustainability, should be considered in policymaking and science communication.

REFERENCES

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