

Youth Engagement in Climate Action: Addressing Crime, Education, and Resilience in Coastal Jamaica

By Connor Marshall

Author Biography

Hello, my name is Connor Marshall. I am a senior at Thomas A. Edison High School in Alexandria, Virginia, where I am currently enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Program. I was a part of the three year Global STEM Challenges Program at my highschool, earning a degree of academic excellence. At my school, I am the President and founder of the National English Honor Society, along with our film club and photography club. My dream school is the University of Virginia, and I am planning to major in the Liberal Arts and Sciences.

In my free time, I love to play soccer and volleyball, in both of which I compete competitively. I have a famed social media account where I post my photography and videography. I have a fondness for learning, and currently I am learning to play the guitar. Writing has always been a big passion of mine, and I am thrilled to have been able to apply my skills to this publication.

Abstract

If someone were to ask what the Caribbean is like, they would most likely speak of the beautiful beaches and tourist destinations. It's a common misconception that the Caribbean is only paradise, and due to fewer networks available in the area to produce reports on climate change, it becomes an overlooked issue. Jamaica, a small island nation in the Caribbean, is no exception. Small Island Nations are some of the most vulnerable communities to climate change in the world—they tend to lack resources, a strong population, and have a reliance on imports along with a dependence on ocean resources which are being directly affected by climate change. While Jamaica only contributes an extremely small portion of the world's carbon emissions, they are left to deal with repercussions of many states' industrial economies, like the United States and China, who have caused irreversible damage to the environment. It is hard for Small Island Nations like Jamaica to not feel hopeless in the face of climate change—they are dealing with a problem they did not cause, with resources they do not have. But, Jamaica may be able to fend for themselves in creating their own sustainable nation. As a vulnerable country, it is crucial that Jamaica takes the necessary precautions in the next few years to prevent any detrimental weather events that could severely destroy their nation. Building on previous research related to climate action and climate change in Jamaica, this paper presents the voices of Jamaican youth and their experience with climate change.

Keywords: Climate Change; Education; Youth; Engagement; Jamaica; Crime; Religion; Knowledge; Awareness

Introduction

Climate change is posing significant threats to many rural coastal populations in Jamaica; from extreme weather events, to rising sea levels and food scarcities, climate change is becoming more apparent than ever. The United Nations Children's Fund has characterized Jamaican children "among the most vulnerable people in the world" when it comes to climate change (Children Uprooted in the Caribbean, 2019). In the summer of 2024, a category five hurricane caused widespread devastation in the Caribbean, passing through Jamaica and resulting in billions of dollars worth of damage. Severe flooding led to the displacement of thousands and an estimated half-dozen casualties (Myers & Trail 2024). Many of the root causes of climate change are linked to colonialism, capitalism, and systemic issues such as structural inequalities (Deivanayagam et al., 2023). Not all have the same interests, backgrounds, or preferences, but Jamaican youth may be able to find unity and strength in solving climate change. Simple clean-ups, clubs, or protests, can form an unbreakable bond of unification amidst adversity and fear in vulnerable communities (Aykan, 2024). Crime is a significant inhibiting factor of sustainability in Jamaica, so redirecting youth away from the violence at young ages to finding purpose in climate action can hold significant outcomes for Jamaica. (Kilinc et al., 2024). While addressing these issues poses serious complexities, education holds promise as a sustainable solution.

This paper will dive into the potential of climate education to cultivate a more prosperous, educated, and resilient youth society in coastal Jamaica. It reviews implications that follow climate damage including: mental health in the climate crisis, how to help young individuals abdicate from crime to finding purpose in climate action, the difference between climate knowledge and climate engagement, and religion as a driver or inhibitor of sustainable

development. To accomplish this, an online survey has been conducted for students in Kingston, Jamaica. In this survey, students share their personal experiences with climate change by responding to a series of questions. The quantitative data gathered from this survey is designed to shed light on the challenges encountered in motivating Jamaican youth to become proactive participants in sustainable social outreach initiatives. To further color the survey responses in-person interviews with college students from Jamaica currently living locally in the US were performed, offering valuable insight to their personal experience and lives in the scope of climate change.

Literature Review:

Mental Health in the Climate Crisis

An extensive body of research has explored the effects of climate change on the well-being and livelihood of young people across the Caribbean. Through research like this, it has become evident that this issue extends beyond the environmental realm; it has become a significant mental health crisis. The mental health of youth populations is in a severe downturn, directly attributed to the impact of climate change (Hough & Counts, 2023). A study from The National Library of Medicine highlighted that 57% of child psychiatrists reported seeing young people worried and distressed about the climate crisis and its environmental impacts (Sanson & Bellemo, 2021). With extreme weather events wreaking havoc on homes and native lands, notably a recent category-five hurricane in the summer of 2024, many young people are gripped by a pervasive sense of insecurity and fear in the face of climate change (Fritz, 2024).

However, beyond the uncertainty and anxiety, there is hope. Numerous studies in Jamaica have underscored an empowering finding: even attending a simple beach

clean-up can substantially relieve climate anxiety while enhancing overall mental well-being. A study by Martin Doery, the founder of the #2minutebeachclean, explored this very thing. He created a 7 question survey, which accumulated 49 responses, with about 30% of them having attended a regular cleanup. In his results, he found that 80% of participants that attended the clean-up made them feel positive, and 33% said it significantly improved their mental health (Dorey, 2019). One respondent said, “It makes me stop to take notice, which makes me feel present and stops worrying. It is part of my exercise routine – personally I think it is more satisfying than being in a gym! And I feel like I am giving something, which makes me feel positive.” (Dorey, 2019). As another example, a 2024 study conducted by Kayliegh Wyles examined these same effects. In her study, she asked 90 participants to either attend a beach cleanup, a coastal walk, or rockpooling. She reported seeing a significant increase in positive attitudes after participating in one of the three activities—with beach clean ups being the most meaningful to the participants (Wyles, 2024). In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that mental health is instrumental in cultivating a climate-resilient society. Without a sound mental framework, teenagers are less likely to actively engage in climate action and tend to feel increasingly despondent and hopeless, both in their day-to-day lives and in their ability to contribute to the solution (Léger-Goodes et al., 2022).

Climate and Crime

One of the most prominent inhibiting factors facing Jamaican youth from reaching their sustainable potential is crime (CDCS, 2019). Kingston notably, being the location in which my survey and research was conducted, a coastal city and Jamaica’s capital, is responsible for the 16th highest homicide rate in the world (List of Cities by Homicide Rate, n.d.). Most tourists are advised to stay away from Kingston if traveling to Jamaica, and it is considered

a “Level 3: Reconsider Travel” zone. (Jamaica Travel Advisory, 2024). Alarming, young teens are disproportionately the major share of the population that is affiliated with crime and violence, both as offenders and victims (Ward et al., 2017). The geographical concentration of crime in socio-economically vulnerable communities has led to inadequate attention towards climate change; consequently, addressing climate change becomes the least of concerns. Currently, violence is the fourth leading cause of premature death in Jamaica after diabetes, stroke, and heart disease, prompting more emphasis on survival (Ward et al., 2017). Although crime is one of the most complicated and problematic issues to address, guiding youth populations at very young ages through climate education may help them find purpose and prevent them from adopting a life of violence (Kelly, 2022). The youth peace and security council has been successful doing this very thing, creating a sustainable framework of youth led community engagements, civil societies, violence prevention projects, and many more that have mediated Jamaica’s crime issues and have promoted sustainability throughout the island nation (Ward et al., 2017).

Climate Education

One of the most commonly operative forms of climate action is through Community Based Approaches (CBAs). The United Nations, along with various scholars identified regional and local communities as crucial components in the process of achieving the SDGs (GTF et al., 2016; UN Women, n.d.). When the SDGs were created, the UN stressed the importance of community level data (United Nations University, 2017): they allow well-informed prioritization of projects and essentially serve as a test to the efficiency of certain solutions that may be replicated on a larger scale (Reed et al., 2006). While the goal of development is a global matter, the process of achieving it consists of local approaches; a critical component being local education. Young people understand that climate

change will shape their futures—their job, their home, and their quality of life. Climate education is beyond essential to building a sustainable social framework, but there is a lack of climate education in schools; youth populations need to have a basic understanding of climate change before they can do anything about it (Cho, 2023). Findings from around the world argue if schools are a valuable source of climate education or not. Life history, for example, highlights that most youth's introduction to climate awareness comes from an educational experience (Besel et al., 2017). Their qualitative study revealed that 88% of the 66 young adults who were a part of the survey said school was the main source of knowledge on climate change. However, a survey from the National Education association argues over 60% of teachers in school do not talk about climate change in class (Litvinov, 2024).

Knowledge and Engagement

However, individual knowledge itself is not enough to make a significant impact on climate change. While knowledge and education is essential, it is still only the first step; knowledge does not always translate to engagement, and it is in engagement when real change occurs. Appropriate public knowledge is important in supporting public related policies—which are without a doubt, a very influential factor in sustainable development (Khatibi, 2021). But policies are not always successfully executed. A great example is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): the plan was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger around the world, but after 15 years it got replaced by our current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to the MDGs ineffectiveness (Kumar, 2016). The National Library of Medicine argues one of the reasons the MDGs were ineffective is because of insufficient interest in sustainable development (Clemens et al., 2007). When looking on an individual level, many may care about climate change, but do not care enough to positively act and engage, leading

to an absence of sustainable engagement. As harsh as it may sound, economic self-interests will always prevail over environmental advancement (Zhao, 2021). A capitalist system has raised generations of children to prioritize wealth over most aspects of life—even life itself.

Religion in Climate Action

Religion plays a large role in the lives of the majority of the globe. According to the Pew Research Center (2024), there are over 2.6 billion Christians, over 1.6 billion practitioners of Islam, and over 1 billion Hindus, to name a few. Jamaica, a predominantly Christian nation, has the Guinness world record for most churches per square mile, and around 70% of the population practice Christianity (The Colors of Religion, 2024; Religion in Jamaica, 2024). However, this poses an issue: a 2022 study by the Pew Research Center states Religion and Christianity seem to actually be getting in the way of climate action and engagement (Alper, 2022). In their study, they conducted a survey among thousands of U.S. adults and found that those who were more religiously affiliated cared about climate change less—especially among Christians. This was a prominent finding in each sub-survey they did. It poses a question if religious groups and churches are doing an adequate job in incorporating caring for the environment—a common teaching in Christianity—through climate action and engagement. Their results showed that while the majority said they cared for the earth, they were not concerned about climate change (Alper, 2022). This issue is explored in my survey, where one of the survey groups was a youth church organization: Will the responses of the church group be the same as those in the Pew Research Center's study?

While all these problems highlight inhibitions toward sustainable development—whether it is crime, mental health, capitalist ideals, religion, or national negligence—they also highlight connections that can be tied back to a solution:

education.

Methodology

Survey

This study utilizes a qualitative and quantitative research design to explore how youth in coastal Jamaica engage with climate action. I conducted a survey through a google form sent out via mailing list receiving 35 responses across two distinct sample groups: the Jamaican Youth Climate Council (JYCC), a youth group in Jamaica aimed at raising awareness about climate change and its effects among Jamaicans aged 15-25 years old, and a regular youth church group—both groups were based in Kingston. The JYCC was selected due to its formal involvement in climate activism, offering insights into structured approaches to climate resilience. They are an exemplary program of community-based development, and have empowered many youth individuals throughout Kingston, raising considerable awareness in their community (16 responses). In contrast, the youth church group, which does not engage formally with climate issues, provides a perspective based on community and faith-based support systems (19 responses). The church group also serves as a control variable, representing the majority of the youth Jamaican population, and a general measurement for awareness, while the JYCC represents the more knowledgeable population. Both parties worked in-hand to observe the effectiveness of organizations like the JYCC, but also to note the general climate awareness of Jamaican youth.

The survey was composed of three sections, each aimed at invoking a different answer in the respondent. The first section consisted of questions with an likert answer scale 1-5; 1 represented “the least”, and 5 represented “the most”. The higher the number (out of 5) the students chose, the higher they value their own knowledge. The aim of these questions was to gain a basic

understanding of the respondents, and be able to form a base layer of distinction between the two groups’ knowledge.

The second section, comprising multiple-choice questions, was open to free-range response, inciting a deeper and more valuable insight to the depth of their knowledge. Finally, the last section was only two short answer questions. “Can you think of anything that could encourage you or your peers to take active steps in support of climate action?” and “Is there anything you think your school should be doing to better educate students about climate change?” But, it was not the answer to the questions I was necessarily interested in. This section was clearly labeled “Optional”, while all the other questions were required to fill out to submit the form. Since these questions were optional, I used it as a proxy for the individual’s true interest in climate change. Students who are engaged with climate change would take the time to complete this section, while those who did not were not as engaged would not, clearly creating a distinction between the engaged and unengaged groups without the risk of the form being filled out falsely.

Conversations

Only a few days before I was planning to send out the survey, Hurricane Beryl struck the Caribbean and Jamaica, displacing thousands from their homes. I was told by the groups that the survey would not be viable for a few weeks due to some of the ramifications of the disaster, and unfortunately, we had been running on a strict deadline. In this nerve-racking downtime, we came up with another solution and I conducted an informal interview with two Jamaican college students who worked locally over the summer. The two participants were, Participant One, a 23 year old male, and Participant Two, a 25 year old female. Without a strict set of questions, I let the conversations naturally grow but aimed to explore their thoughts on climate change,

their personal beliefs and values, how much exposure they had to the issue in school, and how their peers view climate change. The difference in gender also provided two different perspectives coming from two different backgrounds. They had also provided lots of insight toward the inner-workings of the culture.

Results

Survey Results

Nuanced differences between the two groups are brought to light by this survey on how resilience is conceptualized and done. These findings have demonstrated varied ways of climate action and personal resilience, inspired by each group's social and cultural contexts.

The JYCC participants rated themselves consistently higher when it came to being knowledgeable about climate change, as opposed to the church group. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most aware, JYCC respondents averaged 4.63 for how familiar they are with climate change. The church group averaged 2.63—a 2.0 difference on this scale being a gigantic difference between the general knowledge of the two groups.

The JYCC youth also expressed a better sense of self-assessed understanding with regard to climate change in comparison with one's peers, with an average score of 4.72 as opposed to an average of 3.06 for the church group. This result not only suggests that JYCC members believe they are better informed but also that they can understand the problem of climate change better in relation to others their age.

This is demonstrated in the church group that showed a very strong knowledge base; when asked if they had taken part in any climate initiatives or programs, such as a cleanup or protest, only one person out of their survey pool said they had taken part in

a program.

Response scores on discussion of climate change with peers were low in both groups; however, JYCC participants had a slightly higher frequency in the talks about climate change with a mean of 3.36 out of 5 compared with the church group's score of 1.94. Thus, though none of them frequently discusses climate issues, JYCC is more open toward this kind of discussion.

With respect to specific ways it has affected daily living, both groups have mentioned environmental changes that have included extreme heat, hurricanes, and flooding. Answers provided from the JYCC respondents were more specific, such as "Risk of flooding" and "Environmental degradation," while the responses from the church group remained more generalized, such as "the bad heat and weather." This perhaps makes the distinction that even though both groups are informed about climate change, the JYCC has a more articulate grasp of its tangible manifestations. However, both groups also clearly represented how they were feeling direct impacts within their lives, meaning that they might be feeling climate anxiety. The questions regarding frequency of schools bringing up issues of climate change showed very little activity for both groups. The JYCC averaged 3.36 while the church group was slightly lower at 2.56. All respondents seemed to indicate a definite lack in climate change education, such as the responses "Not really" and the recommendation of "Teach more climate change in school."

Whereas 27% of the respondents in JYCC considered that their families had done specific actions with a view to limiting climate change, such a proportion was relatively smaller, reaching only 20%, in the church group. The JYCC group included direct action examples, such as using LED bulbs and practicing sustainability. In contrast, the actual responses of the

church group were less specific and more generalized, like planting trees.

Both groups seemed to be divided in their thinking on whether or not individual actions can actually make a difference in changing the climate. For example, 46% of the church group responded “yes;” with such comments as: “Be aware and inform your friends.” The JYCC were also similar in this response, with 54% answering “yes,” such as: “Reduce, reuse, recycle.”

The others had ideas on the things that schools could do more to support climate action. Both suggested that there be a climate club. The church group, on their end, suggested, “Incorporate climate change into devotion or have a club for it,” while JYCC recommends the creation of a club or program for raising awareness.

Overall, the findings of this study have demonstrated that members of the JYCC are more aware of and knowledgeable about the climate change issue than their counterparts in the church group. Nevertheless, both groups remain significantly uninvolved in discussions about climate change and in school activities. The JYCC showed more awareness of the impacts of and family actions regarding climate change; however, both groups believe in the role that individual contributions and schools can play for better climate education.

Conversations

In the short discussion with the Jamaican college students, I was able to draw some valuable insight and they seemed to be excited to have the conversation.

Interview with Participant One

Participant one grew up in a rural part of Jamaica, where conversations around climate change were uncommon, while Participant two grew up in a more urban environment and showcased more general awareness.

Participant one highlighted the distance he felt from the issue, and how many of his friends felt the same way. He shared his experience with how some of his old friends were affiliated with crime, and what he thought that meant for climate action. He said while he cares about climate change, he recognizes that he is not deeply involved with climate action.

Participant One, 23.

His friends did not seem particularly focused on the issue, though he himself had some interest in it. He described his community as not particularly engaged with global environmental concerns.

“The majority, I’d say, of the people I hang out with don’t really talk about climate change at all. It is just not something that comes up but I think it is important. I think many of us think of it in the way that we hear about it on the news, but it feels like a faraway thing, like it doesn’t really have to do with us. I also think when it comes to things like climate change, people just do not really connect the dots. We talk about hurricanes, yeah, but we do not always link that to climate change.”

When asked about climate change and how it plays into their day-to-day lives, he explained that it is something his peers are aware of but is rarely ever brought up. I followed up by asking about his experience with crime and climate, and he brought up the persona around his friends who had been affiliated with violence or gangs and how it prevented their engagement in climate action.

“It is not like we talk about climate change, you know? Like I said I think most of my friends and people I grew up with are aware of it, but it is more like in the background, and man we got other things going on...” “Some of my old friends had gotten into crime and gangs and they were the ones that really didn’t care for climate change. It was not much of a priority

to them, like a lot of them never talked about it, and it wasn't really ever a topic of discussion. If anything it looked more like a risk to their 'tough' personality."

He mentioned that while he himself is not deeply involved in climate action, he recognized the importance of the issue, highlighting his knowledge of Jamaica's vulnerability to natural disasters. However, his exposure to the topic had been limited, particularly in settings like church or school, where it was not taught.

"I am Christian and at church we do not really talk about climate change. Not even in school much neither. It is more like we focus on family and community stuff. Climate change just doesn't get brought up. I do hear a lot about God's emphasis on protecting our earth, but it is never really spoken with the words climate change. It is almost like it is not seen as a problem for us here, but with some of the recent hurricanes and all, I think it is becoming harder not to notice it."

He expressed a sense of distance between himself and the larger global climate conversation. While he was personally concerned, he felt that the general culture around him was not engaged with it.

"I feel like if we was to talk about it more, more people would care, but it is just not part of our conversations. It is like, 'Yeah, it is happening, but what can we do about it?' It is not something we hear about much in church or even from the government, and to me at least, something more like that the big countries should worry about."

Interview with Participant 2, 25

Participant 2, who grew up in a more urban setting, shared a slightly different perspective. She felt that while her peers were aware of issues like crime and poverty,

there was also some awareness of climate change, especially through social media and school. However, the connection between environmental issues and their daily lives was still weak for many people.

"People know about climate change, but it is not something we talk about every day. I do not think it is because we do not care, but more like, we do not feel it is something that affects us directly right now. When something like Hurricane Beryl happens, we're reminded, but after that, it is back to normal life."

She believed that while there was a basic understanding of climate change among her peers, many did not feel motivated to take action. She mentioned that social media played a role in raising awareness but did not necessarily translate into tangible engagement.

"We see things about climate change on Instagram and stuff, but it is just like swiping through it. It is there, but it doesn't really stick. For a lot of people, it feels like something the government should be handling. It is not that they do not care, but they feel like it is out of their control."

She also touched on the lack of emphasis on climate change in educational and religious settings, echoing Participant One's sentiments.

"At church, we do not really hear anything about the environment or climate. And in school, it is not a big focus either. We learn about the weather and geography, but not so much about how it connects to climate change or what we can do. It is more just facts, but no real push to take action."

Unlike Participant One, however, she expressed a bit more frustration about the lack of urgency, especially in light of Jamaica's vulnerability to climate-related disasters.

“I feel like with all these hurricanes, people should be taking it more seriously. But it is almost like we just accept that it is gonna happen, and we do not really try to change things. It is frustrating because I care, but it is hard to get others to see why it matters.”

She believed that if schools and churches placed more emphasis on climate education, it could potentially shift attitudes among young people.

“I think if schools or churches talked about climate more, people would start paying attention. Right now, it feels like a distant thing, but if we had more conversations about it, maybe we’d care more. Especially with all the storms we’ve been having, it feels like something we should be more involved in.”

Conclusion

Both Participant one and two highlighted the fact that climate change, while understood by many young Jamaicans, is not a common subject of conversation or action. Crime and other social issues exist but do not overshadow every aspect of life. However, a shared lack of exposure to climate change discussions in school, religious settings, or everyday life has resulted in an overall sense of distance from the issue. Despite this, both showed a personal interest in the topic, suggesting that with more education and engagement, perspectives could shift toward greater environmental responsibility. Many of their answers resonated with the themes in what I observed from the survey with the JYCC and church group.

Discussions & Conclusions

Mental Health and Hope

The first piece of my literature review explored the implications of climate change on our mental health. As the study by the national library of medicine showed, over

57% of child psychiatrists reported seeing young people show anxiety over climate change and its environmental impacts (Sanson & Bellemo, 2021). In my survey, I was able to see similar results. 86% of the respondents across both groups highlighted a wide variety of issues they were concerned about. When asked what they thought mattered most about climate change, all the participants showed strong engagement in the question: 100% of the respondents stated multiple elements of climate change worried them. While the JYCC still had more structured answers, both groups clearly expressed their climate fears, aligning with the studies explored in the literature review.

In the survey, there was a positive correlation among individual responses’ answers to if they thought their individual actions mattered and the overall engagement in the survey. 100% of the respondents who said their individual actions did not have a significant impact on climate change showed similar attitudes in the rest of the survey: they lacked knowledge, engagement, provided poor answers to what they thought mattered about climate change, and did not fill out the optional questions. However, this was only among the church group, as all the respondents in the JYCC said their actions mattered. Their lack of hope may be attributed to their lack of engagement: none of them participated in any sort of activity, rarely talked about it with their peers, and said their family does not take any specific actions to limit their personal climate footprint. But, they also scored their exposure to climate related content in school the lowest at 1.87, compared to the average of 2.96 (across both groups). A new question poses: are these students just not paying attention, or is there truly a general lack of exposure in schools? This was a limitation of my survey, as I was not able to directly speak or get to know any of the respondents, limiting my ability to understand how their behavior may have affected this output.

Crime

It is said that one of sustainability's biggest threats in Jamaican youth societies is crime (CDCS, 2019). Further considering that Kingston has the 16th highest crime rate in the world, the conversation I had with Participant one aligned with this (List of Cities by Homicide Rate, n.d.). He emphasized how crime had become an inhibiting factor to some of his older friends, prevented from taking any proactive measures because there was a stigma around being in a gang—you can not really imagine a gang initiation where you are forced to attend a clean-up. This subsection further aligns with my literature review, presenting the idea that while crime continues, full sustainable development will still be out of reach.

Education

This was the bulk of my literature review and research. This journal has consistently mentioned the power and influence climate education can have as a solution to many of our climate issues. I grappled with different studies on whether schools are efficient or inefficient in teaching and including climate related content in the curriculums. A study from life history says 88% of young adults who were a part of the survey said school was the main source of knowledge on climate change, while the National Education Association argued over 60% of teachers in school do not talk about climate change in class (Litvinov, 2024; Besel et al., 2017). The results of my study align with the National Education Associations conclusions. The lowest rating from the JYCC (3.36) and the second lowest rating for the church group (2.56) were in response to how often their teachers bring up climate change in class. Along with this, over 62% of the students who answered one the optional free response questions said that schools need to do a better job in including climate content during instructional hours, while another 34% said schools need to better

promote and initiate students in afterschool climate clubs. There was an overwhelming number of students who clearly mentioned at least once that schools were not doing enough (almost 90%).

Engagement and Knowledge

When conducting my literature review, surprisingly, there were hardly any articles exploring the idea of knowledge vs. engagement on an individual application scale. It seems like such a big issue, as many of our problems lie in the lack of engagement: we love to say we are aware of climate change, but will go our whole lives without ever acting on it. Knowledge does not always translate to engagement, and because it seems to be severely overlooked, it guided me to conduct this research. From the church applicant pool I studied, I observed a clear lack of engagement—I disregarded the JYCC because they are already actively engaging in climate action. Even those who valued their knowledge higher and demonstrated an overall stronger base of knowledge displayed the same level of engagement as those who filled the survey out lazily and skipped questions. Only one member of the church group said they had attended a climate related event—a beach clean up—while every other applicant said they had never. Some may care, yes, but is it enough?

Religion

Lastly, as explored by the Pew Research center, religion seemed to play a negative role in climate engagement, finding that U.S. adults who were more Religiously affiliated cared about climate change less (Alper, 2022). Although this was a limitation in my research as it was not a main topic of exploration, Participant one spoke about how he did not hear or talk about climate change in school or church. While it may only be one individual, the trends and statistics available speak for millions.

Conclusion:

In summary, this paper has demonstrated the knowledge and shared the voices of youth individuals in Kingston, Jamaica, and emphasized the need for further scholar examination of translating climate knowledge to climate action, with education serving as the guiding sustainable solution. By acknowledging and understanding the intersections of mental health, crime, education, engagement, and religion in the climate crisis, stakeholders can develop strategies that can empower youth to become active participants in climate action. These strategies must prioritize mental well-being, provide accessible education, and foster environments that push for meaningful engagement with climate issues. Only through a concerted effort can we hope to equip the next generation to navigate the complexities of climate change and emerge as leaders in the fight for a sustainable future.

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Appendix

Full Survey Questions

How familiar are you with climate change?

How often do you talk about climate change with your peers?

How often does your school raise questions of climate change in class?

Can you name any specific ways that climate change has impacted your daily life?

Have you ever taken part in a program or initiative aimed at combating climate change (outside the JYCC)? If so, can you provide the name and brief details about the program(s) If none, leave blank.

Has your family ever taken any specific actions aimed at limiting climate change?

Do you believe individual actions can make a significant impact on climate change?

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS*

Can you think of anything that could encourage you or your peers to take active steps in support of climate action?

Is there anything you think your school should be doing to better educate students about climate change?