

Emotional Awareness 2026

The Global Shift Report

Four emotional phenomena. Five datasets. One emerging pattern. How dread, doom, anxiety, and doomscrolling are changing culturally in 2026, and what these directional shifts may suggest about collective emotional experience.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between May 2025 and May 2026, four emotional phenomena (anxiety, dread, doom, and doomscrolling) appear to have undergone a directional shift in how they are collectively searched, named, and experienced. This report synthesises Google Trends data across 12-month and 3-month windows, the World Happiness Report 2026, the Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 dataset (92 countries, community-compiled), and peer-reviewed physiological signal research (Girgis et al., 2026, Scientific Reports) to document that shift. The central observation is this: emotional awareness in 2026 appears to be shifting away from primarily definitional modes. The data suggests it may be becoming more coping-oriented, relational, and culturally embedded. Definition-oriented searches appear to be declining. Coping strategy searches are rising sharply. And collective emotional framing is breaking out. The question people are searching is simply: "does anyone else feel this?" This is not a mental health crisis report. It is a report about where the language, behaviour, and body-felt experience of human emotion is moving, and what that movement is telling us.

SCOPE NOTE

This report is an independent interpretive analysis, not a clinical, diagnostic, or epidemiological study. It does not claim that search trends cause emotional states, that social media causes anxiety, or that Google Trends data can diagnose population mental health. The report identifies directional patterns across public datasets and proposes cautious interpretations for further discussion. Readers are encouraged to consult primary sources before drawing independent conclusions.

01

A Possible Shift: From Naming to Living With

For much of the past decade, a highly visible mode of online emotional engagement was definitional. People searched to understand what they were feeling, trying to assign language to internal experience. Queries such as "what is anxiety," "doomscrolling meaning," and "sense of doom definition" reflected a strong explanatory orientation in emotional search behaviour.

That mode is giving way to something different. The 2026 data appears to show a directional pattern across all four phenomena studied: definition queries are declining while coping, symptom, and relational queries are rising. People appear to be asking less about what these feelings are. They are asking how to live with them, and increasingly whether other people feel them too.

DEFINITION

COPING

RELATIONAL / CULTURAL

This trajectory, from naming to managing to sharing, is worth paying attention to. Across four independent search phenomena measured over both 12-month and 3-month windows, similar directional patterns appear repeatedly, though not identically. That consistency across different emotional terms, cultural entry points, and user intents suggests the shifts may reflect something broader than isolated search fluctuations.

The World Happiness Report 2026 data provides the structural context: Finland, Iceland, and Denmark top the global wellbeing rankings, while countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia sit at the bottom. But the happiness index measures cognitive life evaluation, not the texture of daily felt experience. The divergence between high-happiness scores and rising anxiety burden in the same countries is a gap this report addresses directly.

02

The Four Signals: What Google Trends Reveals

Google Trends data, while non-clinical, offers something clinical datasets cannot: real-time access to how people are naming their inner experience when they turn to the internet for recognition. The data below compares 12-month and 3-month windows for four search terms, identifying both directional shifts and emerging query clusters that indicate where emotional language is moving.

Signal 01: Anxiety

"Anxiety coping strategies" rose +1,200% over 12 months. "Health anxiety" is up +120%. The medical definition is fading; the lived management is rising.

12-Month Top Rising: Anxiety coping strategies +1,200%, anxiety management +500%, performance anxiety +350%, health anxiety +120%, social anxiety +60%

3-Month Shift: "Anxiety symptoms" +100%, social anxiety disorder growing, comparative framing emerging ("panic vs anxiety")

Trajectory: Medical basics, then coping and management, then relational and comparative framing

Note: Some rising queries in the broad "anxiety" term include unrelated content (technology searches), reflecting Google's broad matching. Only emotionally relevant signals are reported here.

Signal 02: Sense of Dread

"Existential dread" rose +70% over 12 months and then began normalising. Dread is moving from crisis language toward integrated cultural vocabulary.

12-Month Top Rising: Existential dread +70%, sense of impending doom +7%, dread meaning +5%

3-Month Shift: Overwhelming dread -30%, impending doom -40%, "sense of dread meaning" +20% (definition stabilising)

Trajectory: Existential crisis framing, then normalisation, then cultural integration

Key Insight: The sharp decline in "overwhelming dread" queries suggests the acute crisis peak has passed and dread is being absorbed into everyday emotional vocabulary.

Signal 03: Sense of Doom

Panic attack searches +500%. The breakout query "does anyone else sense impending doom" signals a fundamental shift: doom is becoming a collective emotional experience, not just a personal medical symptom.

12-Month Top Rising: Panic attack symptoms +500%, pulmonary embolism +250%, heart attack symptoms +100%, anxiety symptoms +70%

Breakout Query: "Does anyone else sense impending doom": a new query with no prior baseline, reflecting the shift toward collective framing

3-Month Shift: Panic attack symptoms +160%, medical framing sustained, collective and relational framing emerging

Trajectory: From medical warning signal toward collective emotional experience

Key Insight: The co-rise of doom and panic attack searches suggests that body-felt alarm may be an important part of current distress language. This does not prove that bodily alarm is more dominant than cognitive anxiety; it shows that panic-related and symptom-related language is becoming more visible in search behaviour.

Signal 04: Doomscrolling

From academic curiosity to crossword clue in 12 months. Doomscrolling has completed its cultural mainstreaming arc. The rise of "how to stop" searches suggests people are now acting on the awareness.

12-Month Rising: Doomscrolling multilingual spread ("que es doomscrolling" +40%, "o que é" +110%), cultural references emerging

Breakout Queries: "Result of doomscrolling perhaps crossword" appearing as a crossword clue signals full cultural embedding

3-Month Shift: "Stop doomscrolling" +20%, "how to stop doomscrolling" +20%, coping urgency rising

Trajectory: From academic definition to coping urgency to cultural mainstreaming

Key Insight: Doomscrolling is the only one of the four signals to show full completion of the definition→coping→cultural arc within this reporting window.

Girgis et al. 2026: Key Findings Relevant to This Report

Fear was the most physiologically distinct emotion across nearly 25,000 participants. For most other emotions, physiological signals alone could not reliably predict what participants reported feeling.

Fear vs All classifier: Achieved 0.88 F1 score, suggesting the body's fear response may produce a more consistent physiological signature than other emotional states

Broad emotion classification: Overall F1 score of 0.24 to 0.29, indicating the body's signals do not map cleanly to named emotional categories

Critical finding: Using participants' own subjective rating reduced classification accuracy compared to the intended stimulus category

Implication: What people say they feel and what their body signals are expressing are not always the same thing

Source: Girgis J., Lavoie R. & Blain-Moraes S. (2026). Scientific Reports. doi:10.1038/s41598-026-48250-7

The Global Context: Happiness, Anxiety, and the Treatment Gap

To understand why these search shifts matter, they must be read against the structural backdrop of global emotional wellbeing. The World Happiness Report 2026 and the Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 dataset, covering 92 countries, together appear to indicate a system under considerable strain.

Anxiety prevalence by selected country. Source: Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 dataset (community-compiled, Kaggle)

The data shows a pattern worth noting, but it should be interpreted cautiously: the countries with the highest anxiety prevalence tend toward higher daily social media use in several cases. Brazil leads on anxiety at 9.3% with 3.8 hours of daily social media use. Nigeria uses social media most of all at 4.8 hours per day, while reporting lower clinical anxiety prevalence, though with a 90% treatment gap that makes under-reporting likely. The relationship is uneven and should not be read causally, but the overlap is notable enough to report as a descriptive pattern.

The Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 shows an average treatment gap of 58.9% across 92 countries . This means that in the average country, more than half of people who need mental health care are not receiving it. In low-income countries, that gap reaches 90–97%. The emotional distress reflected in Google Trends searches is largely being processed outside any formal support system. That makes what people search for, and how they search for it, functionally important data.

5.6%	58.9%	2.2h	9.3%
Global average anxiety prevalence across 92 countries	Average treatment gap across countries studied	Average daily social media use globally	Brazil's anxiety prevalence, highest in this dataset

04

The Physiological Layer: What the Body Is Telling Us

The search data and prevalence statistics describe the surface of emotional experience. A 2026 study published in *Scientific Reports* , described by its authors as the largest dataset of emotion-annotated physiological signals collected from a public setting, offers a glimpse beneath that surface.

Girgis, Lavoie, and Blain-Moraes (2026) collected physiological signal data from nearly 25,000 participants at the Montreal Science Centre, measuring electrodermal activity (EDA), blood volume pulse (BVP), and skin temperature across emotional states including fear, calm, sadness, frustration, and love. Their findings are directly relevant to what the search trend data is showing.

Girgis et al. 2026: Key Findings Relevant to This Report

Fear was the most physiologically distinct emotion across nearly 25,000 participants. For most other emotions, physiological signals alone could not reliably predict what participants reported feeling.

This finding is significant in the context of the search data. If people's subjective emotional labels diverge from their physiological signals, then searches such as "I feel anxious," "sense of doom," or "dread for no reason" may function as rough linguistic proxies for experiences people are trying to understand. Search behaviour should not be treated as diagnosis or symptom measurement, but it can provide insight into how emotional experience is being described publicly.

"Some emotionally relevant information may emerge in bodily experience before it is fully translated into language, formal assessment, or clinical systems."

This insight connects directly to earlier original research on this topic. Carvey (2026) identified the gap between clinical anxiety burden and body-felt experience as a formally unstudied layer in existing datasets, arguing that the region between felt body signal and formal clinical category "has no longitudinal dataset, no instrument, and no study yet attached to it." The Girgis et al. (2026) findings provide the first large-scale physiological evidence for why that gap exists: the body and the label may be reflecting different aspects of emotional experience.

"Some emotionally relevant information may emerge in bodily experience before it is fully translated into language, formal assessment, or clinical systems."

05

The Happiness Paradox: High Scores, Hidden Signals

The World Happiness Report 2026 documents a global ranking in which Finland (7.764), Iceland (7.701), and Denmark (7.688) lead. At the other end, Afghanistan (1.446), Congo DR (2.761), and Sierra Leone (3.401) sit at the bottom. These scores reflect the Cantril Ladder: how people cognitively evaluate their lives on a 0–10 scale.

Happiness score vs anxiety prevalence. Sources: World Happiness Report 2026 and Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 dataset

Country	Happiness Score	Anxiety Prevalence
Finland	7.764	3.1%
USA	6.816	7.7%
Brazil	6.081	9.3%
Portugal	6.241	8.7%
Japan	6.130	4.7%
Afghanistan	1.446	—

Sources: World Happiness Report 2026 · Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 dataset (community-compiled, Kaggle)

The paradox is visible in the data: the United States ranks 23rd for happiness globally (6.816) while showing one of the highest anxiety prevalence rates at 7.7%. Brazil scores 6.08 for happiness while carrying the highest anxiety prevalence in the dataset at 9.3%. Portugal sits at 6.24 happiness with 8.7% anxiety. The cognitive evaluation of life quality and the felt body burden of anxiety appear to be measuring different layers of the same human experience,

and in several countries they seem to be moving in opposite directions.

As Carvey (2026) observed in earlier Preveal research: "A person can genuinely rate their life a seven out of ten and still wake with a heaviness in the chest every morning that they do not have words for. The Cantril Ladder was not designed to capture that layer." The 2026 datasets reviewed in this report are broadly consistent with the possibility that this gap remains present across multiple high-income and upper-middle-income countries.

06

Implications: What This Shift May Suggest

For individuals

The shift from definitional to coping-oriented search behaviour suggests that a growing number of people may have moved past asking "what is this feeling" and are now asking "how do I live with it." This may reflect a gradual maturation of emotional literacy, and it appears to be creating demand for tools that facilitate coping and reflection rather than classification and diagnosis.

For researchers and clinicians

The 58.9% average global treatment gap means that the majority of people experiencing anxiety are not in clinical systems. Their primary information-seeking happens via search. The trajectory from definition to coping to relational framing suggests that peer-recognition and community framing are functioning as informal support mechanisms. Formal systems that ignore this layer are missing where most emotional processing is actually occurring.

For content and media

The cultural mainstreaming of doomscrolling, evidenced by its appearance in crossword puzzles and viral website references, suggests that these emotional phenomena are no longer niche wellness topics. They are part of mainstream cultural vocabulary, and content that treats them with appropriate depth and honesty will find audiences that generic wellness content will not.

For body-signal tools

The Girgis et al. (2026) finding that subjective emotional labels diverge from physiological signals creates a specific use case for tools that invite body-first reflection before conceptual labelling. When what the body is doing and what the mind labels it as are not the same, an intermediate step of noticing body signals before assigning meaning may be worth considering before applying a label.

07

Where Preveal Operates in This Landscape

Preveal is not a clinical tool. It does not diagnose, classify, or treat any condition. What it does is position itself precisely in the gap that this report documents: between the body signal and the clinical label, between the search query and the formal support system, between "I feel something" and "I know what to do about it."

The non-diagnostic body-signal reflection framework that Preveal uses is grounded in the observation that emotional awareness may begin in the body before it is fully translated into language. In a data environment where "panic attack

symptoms" is up 500% and "does anyone else feel this" is a breakout query, the need for a non-judgmental space to notice and name body-level experience, before a clinical label is required, appears to reflect a genuine and growing need. It is addressing one visible mode of emotional processing reflected in search behaviour: people trying to name, manage, and make sense of body-felt distress before it becomes a formal clinical label.

Google Trends data normalises search volume to a 0–100 scale and does not report absolute search volumes. Directional changes (rising/falling) are reliable signals; absolute comparisons between terms are not. Rising query percentages reflect relative change within each term's own query cluster over the specified time window.

Broad search terms (particularly "anxiety") can surface unrelated rising queries through Google's topic-matching algorithm. This report excludes clearly irrelevant queries and notes this limitation transparently.

World Happiness Report 2026 scores reflect cognitive life evaluation via the Cantril Ladder. They are not measures of moment-to-moment affect, physiological wellbeing, or pre-linguistic emotional experience.

Global Mental Health Crisis Index 2026 is a community-compiled dataset hosted on Kaggle (compiled by A. Taqi Shah), not an official institutional index. Its stated sources include WHO Mental Health Atlas 2024, GBD Study 2023 (IHME), Our World in Data (March 2026), OECD 2024, and DataReportal 2025. Individual data points should be cross-checked against primary sources before citing independently. Cross-country comparisons are further limited by differences in diagnostic infrastructure and reporting systems.

Interpretation caution: Correlations, search patterns, and directional trend shifts described in this report should not be interpreted as proof of causation, prevalence forecasting, or diagnostic insight at the individual level.

This report does not claim causal relationships between datasets. It documents co-occurring trends across independent data sources and identifies the space between them as warranting closer attention.

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Preveal: Non-Diagnostic Body-Signal Reflection

The data has a gap. Your body does not.

Preveal creates space to notice what your body is already signalling, before you need a label for it. Free. Non-diagnostic. No clinical framework required.

Citable · Shareable Free to distribute with attribution

Google Trends 2025–2026 World Happiness Report 2026 Global MH Crisis Index 2026 dataset Scientific Reports (Girgis 2026) GBD Study 2021–2023 WHO MH Atlas 2024 DataReportal 2025

Q3 2026 Quarterly Update Planned: August 2026 Subscribe via Preveal for notification when published.

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METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

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