

Locale and Gender as Determinants of Environmental Awareness among School Children

Kang T.K. and Grewal D.K.

Department of Human Development, College of Home Science
Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

ABSTRACT

Human being is a product of organic evolution and natural environment. His very existence, survival and progress on earth depend on the quality of the environment. Environmental awareness is defined as the sum total of responses that people make to various thematic aspects of the construct environmental education. In simple terms it means knowledge and understanding of facts and concepts related to environment and consequences of various environmental problems like pollution, population explosion, deforestation, ecological disruption, energy crises etc. Environment has become the concern of all academicians, intellectuals, scientists, policy makers and government across the continents. We must understand that to improve the environment is to improve the quality of life. It is not only a question of air and water pollution. It includes elimination of diseases, hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, destruction of forests, extermination of wildlife, erosion of soil and accumulation of waste. The present study was undertaken to assess the environmental awareness of 200 adolescents (100 boys and 100 girls) in the age range of 14-16 years residing in the Ludhiana district of Punjab state. Environment Attitude Scale (2001) by Taj was used to assess the level of environmental awareness among adolescents. The scale comprised of 61 items representing six areas of environment namely; population explosion, health and hygiene, polluters, wild life, forests and environmental concerns. The result of the study revealed non significant gender differences in environmental awareness but female students were having higher level of environmental awareness as compared to males i.e females were scoring high mean values as compared to their male counterparts indicating higher levels of environmental awareness. Locale-wise analysis revealed that urban children had higher level of environmental awareness than rural children.

Keywords: Environmental Awareness, Gender, Locale, Adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human being is a product of organic evolution and natural environment. His very existence, survival and progress on earth depend on the quality of the environment. The term environment

comes from the Latin word 'environ' which is the combination of two words i.e., En (in) Viron (circle) which means to encircle or to surround. According to International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, environment is the aggregate of all external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism. Dictionary of Social Sciences defines environment as consists of all the external sources of factors to which a person or aggregate of persons are actually or potentially responsive (Dubey and Samal 1998). Thus, the word environment refers to the surroundings, the aggregate of circumstances of an organism or group of organisms specially the combination of external or extrinsic physical conditions that affect and influence the growth and development of organisms (Sandhu and Dhillon 2005).

Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth. In the long and tortuous evolution of the human race on this planet a stage has been reached when, through the rapid acceleration of science and technology, man has acquired the power to transform his environment in countless ways and on an unprecedented scale. Both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights and the right to life itself (Kumari 2001). Man is the best creativity of the God. He has the ability of transforming his surroundings while doing so he can develop and enhance the quality of life for his fellow human beings. But when heedlessly applied the same creativity can cause harm to the environment. Thus, since the beginning of the earth he benefited the earth and with same zeal caused harm also. The actions of man caused harm to the physical, social and mental health of his fellow human beings as well as the ecological balance is disturbed.

In the present age the entire globe is facing severe environmental problems. The loss of forests, loss of soil productivity, decreasing reservoir of oil and natural gas, depletion of ozone layer, global warming are some of the problem of great concern for scientists and intellectuals all over the world. While over-exploitation of natural resources is responsible for some of these problems. The global problems relating to degradation of natural resources and pollution have increased dramatically. Natural resources are depleted by excessive use. Fresh water scarcity on a global scale, deforestation, degradation of coastal and marine areas, soil depletion and loss of biodiversity, are some of the problems that have become a major concern. Air and water pollution have reached such levels that have already resulted in serious health problems, as well as negative impact on the environment, and inevitably influencing prospects for long-term economic growth (Krishnamacharyulu and Reddy 2005). Pollution is not external only like sound pollution, air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, but also takes root internally in man's nature and activity like as health pollution, mental pollution, social pollution, economical pollution, political pollution, cultural pollution as well as education pollution. Some other problems are the direct outcome of

human greed and lack of concern towards environment. This is only because of ignorance of awareness of environmental education. This imposes a question on the human awareness and attitude towards environment, which otherwise poses a threat for human existence itself (Kukreti and Gihar 2004).

Environmental awareness is defined as the sum total of responses that people make to various thematic aspects of the construct environmental education (Patel and Patel 1994). In simple terms it means knowledge and understanding of facts and concepts related to environment and consequences of various environmental problems like pollution, population explosion, deforestation, ecological disruption, energy crises etc. Environment has become the concern of all academicians, intellectuals, scientists, policy makers and government across the continents.

On the other hand environmental awareness means to help social groups and individuals to acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems. The importance of environmental awareness cannot be over emphasized. We must understand that to improve the environment is to improve the quality of life. It is not only a question of air and water pollution. It includes elimination of diseases, hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, destruction of forests, extermination of wildlife, erosion of soil and accumulation of waste.

Environment is the habitat for all living things, including human, animal as well as plant. It is very important to know and appreciate the existence of this nature, and realize its existence that is closely related to human's life. On the other hand, human's activity is an act or manner that is based on emotion and human's characteristic itself. The emotion and the characteristic emerge differently according to the aspect of education, economy, social and spiritual. This is why education is very important in shaping the moral values and consciousness within human self towards their surroundings, as education includes knowledge and awareness of individual towards the significance of environment. The main hurdle in protecting the environment in India today is that there is a lack of scientific knowledge and will to act. Thus, the awareness towards the protection and conservation should be developed within each human self, so that they can prevent themselves from ruining the chain of biology. Besides, they will make an effort to protect and conserve this nature once he realizes his responsibility towards his surrounding. Within the context of students, their awareness towards the importance of environment is able to protect this earth from the entire pollution (Hassan *et al* 2009). As the problem is one, of the people, for the people and by the people, a proper understanding and support of the people will go a long way in carrying out anti-pollution measures.

Present situation demands the development of attitudes that help students to acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and motivation and commitment to participate in environmental maintenance and improvement (Engleson 1985). Young students as future citizens must know their environment, its uses and how to preserve and conserve it. There is no doubt that attention to environment was overdue and it is time to commit ourselves to look after it with all possible means. It is a moral imperative and prerequisite for environment sustainability. We must remember that man is an integral part of environment. It is, therefore, essential to remember that by our habit of ignoring environmental issues, the issues will not end rather they will persist and will cost tremendous harm on the next generation. So it is more important than how the public feels about the environment. Values and awareness about environment demands a cognitive map defining specific course of collective action to save the environment. As a cultural universal, mankind depends on nature to survive (Snow and Noe 1990). Some civilizations have accepted the natural environment as the gift of God and started excessive consumption of the natural resources, which ultimately led to the exhaustion of natural resources. Thus, it becomes necessary to develop awareness and positive attitude in people towards environment since their adolescence. Adolescent stage is the stage of storm and strife. In this age effects are perennial. Adolescent children are highly sensitive to issues related with environment (Kukreti and Gihar 2004). The role of students/adolescents would go a long way in achieving such desired goals. The whole society, especially the students should realize that the peaceful environment is the main element within human's life. Each of them should know and believe that by concern towards the environment, we can bring the harmony within human's life, society and nation itself. Besides, the appreciation towards the gift of God needs a responsibility and realization from every human being.

With reference to the above-mentioned details the present study was framed to study the locale and gender as determinants of environmental awareness among school children.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out in Ludhiana district of Punjab state. The sample for the study consisted of 200 school children, equally distributed over both the sexes (100 boys and 100 girls) in the age range of 14-16 years during the academic session 2010-2011 from various co-educational rural and urban Government High and Senior Secondary schools. The sample for the study was selected by using multistaged sampling procedure. Environment Attitude Scale (2001) by Taj was used to assess the level of environmental awareness of the adolescents. This scale measures the overall environmental awareness of the respondents besides their awareness on six aspects of environment i.e. population explosion, health and hygiene, polluters, wild life, forests and environmental concerns. The scale consisted of 61 items to be rated on four point rating scale.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Gender differences among school children across various dimensions of environmental awareness

Environmental Awareness Dimensions	Total (N=200)		Male (n=100)		Female (n=100)		t-value
	Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)	
Health & Hygiene	17.75	3.48	17.71	3.50	17.78	3.48	0.14
Wild Life	19.79	4.16	19.54	4.23	20.03	4.09	0.83
Forests	15.70	3.38	15.63	3.59	15.76	3.17	0.27
Polluters	86.64	10.08	85.79	11.90	87.48	7.81	1.19
Population Explosion	17.32	3.30	17.33	3.51	17.30	3.10	0.06
Environmental Concerns	53.57	7.59	53.05	8.46	54.08	6.61	0.96
Total	210.74	22.64	209.05	24.69	212.43	20.41	1.06

Table-1 illustrates the gender differences in mean scores of various dimensions of environmental awareness among school children. It clearly indicates that non-significant gender differences existed in all the dimensions of environmental awareness i.e health & hygiene, wild life, forests, polluters, population explosion and environmental concerns. Comparison of mean scores showed that females were scoring higher mean values than males in almost all the dimensions indicating that they had better awareness regarding health & hygiene, wild life, forests, polluters and environmental concerns as compared to boys where as boys scored better in awareness regarding population explosion only. The calculated t-value for all the dimensions was also found to be non-significant. The present results are inline with the findings of Patel (1995) who reported that girl students were more sensitive to environmental issues than boys. Shahnawaj (1990) also found that female students possessed significantly more awareness than males. Larijani (2010) revealed that female teachers had significantly higher levels of environmental awareness as compared to their male counterparts.

Table 2: Locale differences among school children across various dimensions of environmental awareness

Environmental Awareness Dimensions	Total (N=200)		Rural (n=100)		Urban (n=100)		t-value
	Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)	
Health & Hygiene	17.75	3.48	17.15	3.86	18.34	2.95	2.45*
Wild Life	19.79	4.16	18.97	4.43	20.60	3.71	2.82**
Forests	15.70	3.38	15.11	3.57	16.28	3.08	2.48*
Polluters	86.64	10.08	85.85	9.23	87.42	10.85	1.10
Population Explosion	17.32	3.30	17.14	3.35	17.49	3.26	0.75
Environmental Concerns	53.57	7.59	52.71	8.32	54.42	6.72	1.60
Total	210.74	22.64	206.93	25.42	214.55	18.85	2.41*

**Significant at 5% level*

***Significant at 1% level*

Table-2 reveals the locale differences in mean scores of various dimensions of environmental awareness among rural and urban school going children. Significant locale differences were found in case of health & hygiene, wild life, forests and over all environmental awareness where as other dimensions i.e polluters, population explosion and environmental concerns were having non-significant differences. It is very much clear from the table that urban respondents scored high on mean values than rural respondents in all the dimensions indicating that they were having higher levels of environmental awareness as compared to their counterparts. Dubey and Samal (1998) found that environmental awareness of urban women and educated women was significantly higher than that of rural women and uneducated women.

4. CONCLUSION

Results of the present study revealed a non-significant gender differences in mean scores of all the dimensions of environmental awareness i.e health & hygiene, wild life, forests, polluters, population explosion and environmental concerns. Findings indicated that girls are more sensitive to environmental issues than boys. However, significant locale differences ($t=2.41; p \leq 0.05$) were found in case of health & hygiene, wild life, forests and over all environmental awareness where as other dimensions i.e polluters, population explosion and environmental concerns were having non-significant differences. It is concluded that gender is not a factor affecting environmental

awareness of school students. The main reason for almost equal environmental awareness of boys and girls is that they are studying together in the same teaching learning environment of the schools and receiving same inputs. The mean scores obtained by urban respondents were higher than the mean scores of rural respondents. Results showed that urban children had better environmental awareness than rural children. The reason for higher environmental awareness among urban children than rural children may be the family background and educational qualification of parents. Urban parents are concerned with inculcating environmental awareness in their children so they are aware of the dangers and consequences of environmental degradation at global level. On the other hand, rural children come from families having less educated or illiterate parents. Their main priority is to fulfill the basic needs of their family members. They are not aware of environmental issues so they are unable to pass this awareness to their children.

REFERENCES

- [1] A Dubey and B Samal (1998). Environmental awareness among women. *Indian Psychological Review*, 50, 1, pp 50-56.
- [2] A Hassan, H Juahir and N S Jamaludin (2009) The level of environmental awareness among students to fulfill the aspiration of national philosophy of education. *American Journal of Scientific Research*, 5, pp. 50-58.
- [3] A KumariKrishna (2001) Consulting Editor: ICFAI University, Hyderabad.
- [4] B R Kukreti and S Gihar (2004) Effect of video-intervention strategy on the environmental attitude of secondary students. *Psycho-lingua*, 34, 1, pp. 17-22.
- [5] D G Patel and N A Patel (1994) Environmental Awareness of the primary school Teachers. *The Progress of Education*, 18, 11, pp. 234-236.
- [6] D G Patel and S K Patel (1995) An investigation into the environmental awareness and its enhancement in secondary school teachers. *The progress of Education*, 39, 12, pp. 256-268.
- [7] Engleson (1985) The development and retention of environmental attitudes in elementary school children. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 15, 3, pp. 33-36.
- [8] H Taj (2001) *Environmental Attitude Scale*. Nandini Enterprises, Agra.
- [9] M Larijani (2010) Assessment of environmental awareness among high and primary school teachers. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 31, 2, pp. 121-124
- [10] N Shahnawaj (1990) Environmental awareness and environmental attitude of secondary and higher secondary school teachers and students. Ph.D Thesis University of Rajasthan, *Fifth survey of Educational Research*, 2, 33, pp. 17-59.
- [11] R Snow and F P Noe (1990) Hispanic cultural influenced on environmental concern. *Journal of Environment Education*, 21(2): 27
- [12] V Krishnamaracharyulu and G S Reddy (2005) *Environmental Education: Aims and Objectives of Environmental Education: Importance of Environmental Education*. Hyderabad: Neelkamal Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- [13] V Sandhu and J Dhillon (2005) Environmental education awareness among elementary school teacher. *Shikhya Khoj Patra*, 4, pp. 32-36.