

Environmental ethics among adolescents: A study of gender and locale difference

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ABSTRACT

The present study entitled 'environmental ethics among rural and urban adolescent boys and girls' was undertaken in the Kapurthala district of Punjab. The study was designed to compare environmental ethics of adolescents across gender and locale. The sample comprised of 200 adolescents (100 boys and 100 girls) of age group 14-16 years. Environmental Ethics Scale by Taj was used to assess the environmental ethics of the adolescents. Gender differences revealed that girls possessed more environmental ethics as compared to boys. In locale differences urban adolescents were found to be more environment sensitive as compared to rural adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Human is a product of organic evolution and 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 Encyclopaedia 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 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).

Environmental Ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. Environmental ethics takes into consideration the moral obligations human beings have concerning the environment (Gillaspy, 2012). It refers to the responsibility to understand the environmental consequences of our consumption and need to recognise our individual and social responsibility to

conserve natural resources and protect earth for future generations (Taj, 2001).

Environmental ethics simply tries to answer the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how we should use the Earth's resources and how we should treat other species, both plant and animal. Environmental ethics applies ethics to the environment, analogously ethics applied to business, medicine, engineering, law and technology. Environmental quality is necessary for quality of human life. Humans dramatically rebuild their environments; still, their lives, filled with artifacts, are lived in a natural ecology where resources— soil, air, water, photosynthesis and climate—are matters of life and death. Culture and nature have entwined destinies, similar to (and related to) the way minds are inseparable from bodies. So ethics needs to be applied to the environment. Ethics belongs to the realm of values. Environmental ethics includes “principles and values that a man as an individual and as a member of the society should follow so as to conserve, preserve and manage the environment”. Thus, ethics has direct relationship with human behaviour mediated through the value system developed by an individual. However whereas environmental values deal with such questions as what is environmentally good? And what is bad? Environmental ethics relates to, doing what is good and not doing what is bad. Environmental ethics deals with the ethical relationship between human and the environment of which he is a part. Thus, environmental ethics aims to explicate how one should behave or what rules and moral obligations one should have while interacting with his environment. These moral obligations reflect the set of standards for making decision, choice and actions.

Adolescence is the period in which the character of the individual takes its final shape and its value patterns become more or less stable. He formulates his own philosophy of life on the basis of these values inhabited by him. Adolescence is also a stage when young people extend relationships beyond their parents and family. It is a of intense influence of peers and the outside world in the society. Adolescents as they mature cognitively, the mental functioning process becomes analytic, capable of abstract thinking leading to articulation and independent ideology. These are truly the years of creativity, empathy, idealism and with bountiful spirit of adventure. Thus, if nurtured properly youth can be mobilized to contribute

significantly to national development.

Keeping above discussion in mind present study was framed with following objectives:

- To determine gender and locale differences in environmental ethics among adolescents.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The sample for the present study comprised of 200 adolescents within the age range of 14-16 years, belonging to intact families. For selection of the sample, list of Government High and Senior Secondary School of Kapurthala district was procured from District Education Officer, Kapurthala. For Urban Sample: one block *i.e.* Phagwara was purposively selected from the five blocks of Kapurthala district. Again from this selected block two schools were purposively selected for the data collection. For Rural Sample: Two Government Senior Secondary Schools were purposively selected from the selected block *i.e.* Phagwara. Out of these selected rural and urban schools, the required number of respondents were randomly selected from the list of adolescents (boys and girls) within the age range of 14-16 years which was prepared from the school records. Thus a total of 200 adolescents equally distributed both over the locale and gender categories were randomly selected.

Environmental Ethics Scale by Taj (2011) was used to assess environmental ethics of the adolescents. The scale consists of 41 items related to different aspects of environmental ethics *i.e.* sanitation, cleanliness, hygiene, flora and fauna, water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution and saving energy.

The scale was translated to Punjabi so that adolescents could easily understand the statements. The minimum and maximum scores ranged between 45 to 135. High scores were interpreted as high ethics and low score as low ethics of the respondents.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows differences in environmental ethics among rural boys and girls. Significant differences were observed between rural boys and rural girls with regard to environmental ethics as t-value ($t= 2.86$; $p \leq 0.01$) was found to be significant. A look at the mean scores revealed that rural girls' mean scores are on higher side (92.46) as compared to rural boys (83.66) indicating that rural girls had more knowledge of environmental ethics as compared

to rural boys.

Table 2 show differences in environmental ethics among urban boys and girls. Non-significant differences were observed between urban boys and urban girls with regard to environmental ethics. A look at the mean scores revealed that urban boys' mean scores are on higher side (96.10) as compared to their counterparts (94.62) indicating that urban boys had more environmental ethics as compared to urban girls. Sharma (2013) interpreted that sex, area and social category of students do not influence each other significantly in their combined influence on environmental awareness ability of the students.

Table 3 shows differences in environmental ethics among total boys and total girls. Non-significant differences in t-value ($t=1.30$) was observed between total boys and total girls with regard to environmental ethics. A look at the mean scores revealed that girls' mean scores are on higher side (93.54) as compared to boys (89.88) indicating that girls had more environmental ethics as compared to boys. Kang and Grewal (2015) undertook a study to assess the environmental awareness among adolescents residing in Ludhiana. The results revealed a

non-significant association between environmental awareness and gender of respondents indicating that male and female school going children have same knowledge level and understanding of different dimensions of environmental awareness. Larijani (2010) concluded that female teachers had significantly higher levels of environmental awareness as compared to their male counterparts.

Table 4 shows differences in environmental ethics among rural girls and urban girls. Non-significant differences were observed between rural girls and urban girls with regard to environmental ethics as t-value ($t=0.93$). A look at the mean scores revealed that rural girls' mean scores are on higher side (96.46) as compared to their urban (94.62) counterparts indicating that rural girls had more environmental ethics as compared to urban girls. Dubey and Samal (1998) explored the influence of the residential background, educational status and their interaction on environmental awareness among women. The results showed that environmental awareness of urban women and educated women was significantly higher than of rural women and uneducated women.

Table 5 shows differences in environmental ethics

Table 1 : Gender differences in mean scores of rural boys and girls in environmental ethics					
Category	Rural boys		Rural girls		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Environmental ethics	83.66	18.06	92.46	12.19	2.86**

**indicates significance of value at $P=0.01$

Table 2 : Gender differences in mean scores of urban boys and girls in environmental ethics					
Category	Urban boys		Urban girls		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Environmental ethics	96.10	11.45	94.62	10.92	0.66

Table 3 : Gender differences in mean scores of total sample in environmental ethics					
Category	Total boys		Total girls		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Environmental ethics	89.88	16.29	93.54	11.56	1.30

Table 4 : Locale differences in mean scores of rural girls and urban girls in environmental ethics					
Category	Rural girls		Urban girls		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Environmental ethics	96.46	12.19	94.62	10.92	0.93

Table 5 : Locale differences in mean scores of rural boys and urban boys in environmental ethics					
Category	Rural boys		Urban boys		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Environmental ethics	83.66	18.06	96.10	11.45	4.11**

**indicates significance of value at $P=0.01$

among rural boys and urban boys. Significant differences existed in t-value ($t=4.11$) between rural boys and urban boys with regard to environmental ethics. A look at the mean scores revealed that urban boys' mean scores are on higher side (96.10) as compared to their rural (83.66) counterparts indicating that urban boys had better environmental ethics as compared to rural boys. Grewal and Kang (2014) also stated that urban children had higher level of environmental awareness than rural children.

It could be concluded that girls were possessing more environmental ethics as compared to boys indicating they are more concern about environment and environmental issues as compared to boys. Girls are more environment friendly and sensitive to the environment. In case of locale differences urban adolescents showed high level of environmental ethics as compared to rural adolescents coming from educated and more environment awared families may be a reason for this urban schools also lay more stress on celebrating environmental related days as compared to rural school thus laying more emphasis on environmental concerns leading to development of more environmental ethics.

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