

# From Hills to Heart: Environmental Awareness and Socio-economic Dynamics in Rural Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

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## **Abstract:**

This study aimed to investigate the intricate relationship between environmental consciousness and the socio-economic characteristics of rural inhabitants in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, while also exploring the perspectives of rural communities on addressing environmental issues. Data for this study were gathered through surveys conducted among fifty rural residents residing in three subdivisions within the Shimla district. The analysis employed the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to examine the association between socio-economic attributes of the rural population and their environmental consciousness. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between age and the source of environmental awareness. This research contributes to a better understanding of the eco-perceptions and environmental realities of rural communities in Shimla, shedding light on the complexities of their environmental consciousness within the context of Himachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Environmental consciousness, Rural inhabitants, Eco-perceptions, Agrochemical usage, Survey data

## **Introduction**

Environmental awareness is a vital facet of a strategic communication process aimed at increasing public knowledge about the environment and its crucial role in sustaining our world. The term "Environment" finds its origins in the French word "Environ," signifying "Surrounding." Thus, it essentially encompasses everything that envelops living beings, including the conditions that shape the lives of individuals and societies. It encompasses natural, social, and cultural elements existing in a specific place and time, influencing human life and those of future generations. This definition extends beyond physical spaces to include living organisms, objects, water, soil, air, and the intricate relationships between them, along with intangible aspects like culture. Understanding environmental fragility and the imperative need to protect it is at the core of environmental awareness. Encouraging such awareness represents a straightforward way for individuals to become stewards of the environment and actively contribute to creating a better future for succeeding generations. To grasp the concept of environmental awareness fully, it is essential to comprehend the broader environmentalist movement. Environmentalism is an ideology that emphasizes humanity's duty to respect, safeguard, and conserve the natural world from the detrimental impacts of human activities. The success of this movement hinges on instilling environmental awareness in society. By educating our friends and family about the delicate nature and indispensable value of the physical environment, we take a significant step toward addressing the challenges that endanger it. The author

introduced the system for gauging international environmental awareness levels in 1997, which was initially applied manually in the research conducted in 'Raising Environmental Awareness in the Baltic Sea' (Partanen-Hertell et al., 1999, and Pemberton et al., 1999). During this study, a method for assessing and comparing the levels of environmental awareness in nine countries surrounding the Baltic Sea was developed and tested. India has enacted several laws to safeguard its natural environment, including the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981, and the Environment Protection Act of 1986 (Saklani, 1989). Additionally, the introduction of a voluntary environmental labelling initiative called ECOMARK in 1991 has served to inform consumers about the eco-friendliness of products. As environmental awareness continues to rise across all segments of society, coupled with the favourable response from both industry and government, India is evolving into a promising market for environmental goods and services. The environmental goods and services (EGS) sector in India, estimated to be around US\$ 4.16 billion, is experiencing substantial growth, with a remarkable annual expansion rate of over 12% (Singh, 2003).

Panth et al. (2015) investigated Environmental Awareness and Environmental Attitude among gender groups (boys and girls) at N.M.V. Lalitpur (U.P.). The data sets were collected from 100 students. During the study, it was found that boys exhibited a higher level of Attitude compared to girls, but a significant difference in Attitude was observed between the two genders. On the other hand, girls demonstrated a higher level of Environmental awareness compared to boys, with no significant difference found in Environmental awareness between the two groups. Padmanabhan et al. (2017) studied the level of environmental awareness among teachers in higher education who were participating in the Orientation Programme (OP-123) at HRDC (Human Resource Development Centre), Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, as well as among students at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. To achieve this, a questionnaire was devised, comprising questions related to various environmental issues such as atmosphere and climate change, biodiversity and forests, water resources, oceans and seas, health, and sanitation. The results indicated that teachers exhibited a notably high degree of environmental awareness. In contrast, among the student category, only 64.28% displayed a high level of awareness concerning environmental issues.

The present study explores the connection between environmental awareness and the socio-economic characteristics of rural residents while also delving into their perspectives on addressing environmental issues. Data was collected from surveys involving fifty rural inhabitants in three subdivisions within Shimla. Statistical analysis, specifically the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ), was employed to assess the relationship between the socio-economic attributes of the rural population and their level of environmental consciousness. The results indicated a significant correlation between age and the source of environmental awareness. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the eco-perceptions and environmental realities of rural communities in Shimla, shedding light on the intricate nature of their environmental consciousness within the context of Himachal Pradesh.

## Material and methods

In order to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, a survey was conducted among 50 rural residents residing in three subdivisions of Shimla district. The primary objective of this research was to assess the levels of environmental awareness within the surveyed population. To accomplish this, a carefully constructed interview schedule was employed. Furthermore, an extensive questionnaire was designed to conduct a socio-economic survey, focusing on two key experiential factors: age and

educational background. The study sought to elucidate the potential influence of these factors on environmental consciousness. The analysis utilised the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to explore the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of rural participants and their environmental awareness. A significance level of 0.05 was applied to all tests in the study. Additionally, the study's results were juxtaposed with those of previous research conducted in different regions of the country, enhancing the context and relevance of the findings

**Results and Discussion**

The study explores the relationship between age (Table 1.) and education (Table 2.) levels with the sources of environmental awareness in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, reveals some significant findings. The study sought to understand how individuals of different age groups and education backgrounds access and utilize sources of environmental awareness, with the sources being categorized into A (Own experience), B (Family and friends), C (Educational Institute), and D (Social media).

**Table 1. Age – type and choices of environmental awareness source**

Age (in years)	Decision making type and choices of environmental awareness source								Total
	A		B		C		D		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<b>Less than 30</b>	3 (5.6)	15	2 (1.96)	28.57	5 (2.8)	50	4 (3.64)	30.76	<b>14</b>
<b>Between 30-50</b>	10 (10)	50	3 (3.5)	42.85	4 (5)	40	8 (6.5)	61.53	<b>25</b>
<b>Above 50</b>	7 (4.4)	35	2 (1.54)	28.57	1 (2.2)	10	1 (2.86)	7.69	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	20	100.00	7	100.00	10	100.00	13	100.00	<b>50</b>

A: Own experience; B: Family and friends; C: Educational Institute; D: Social media (figures in parentheses are expected frequencies)

After evaluation it was found that the calculated  $\chi^2$  Total (31.52) is greater than the critical value (12.592 for  $\alpha = 0.05$  and  $df = 6$ ). So the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a significant relationship between age and the source of environmental awareness.

**Table 2. Education – type and choices of environmental awareness source**

Education	Decision making type and choices of environmental awareness source				Total
	A	B	C	D	

	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<b>Illiterate</b>	5 (1.44)	62.5	3 (1.08)	50	0 (3.06)	0	1 (3.42)	5.26	<b>9</b>
<b>12th Pass</b>	1 (3.36)	12.5	2 (4.02)	33.33	9 (7.14)	52.94	9 (7.98)	47.36	<b>21</b>
<b>Graduate and above</b>	2 (3.2)	25	1 (2.4)	16.66	8 (6.8)	47.05	9 (7.6)	47.36	<b>20</b>
<b>Total</b>	8		6		17		19		<b>50</b>

A: Own experience; B: Family and friends; C: Educational Institute; D: Social media  
(figures in parentheses are expected frequencies)

After evaluation it was found that the calculated  $\chi^2$  Total (47.32) is greater than the critical value (12.592 for  $\alpha = 0.05$  and  $df = 6$ ). So the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a significant relationship between education and the source of environmental awareness. Firstly, when considering the age factor, the data indicates that there is a significant relationship between age and the source of environmental awareness. Specifically, respondents aged less than 30 predominantly relied on their own experiences and social media, while those between 30-50 and above 50 preferred educational institutions and family and friends as their sources of environmental awareness. These findings align with previous research, such as a study by Severo et al. (2019), which showed that younger individuals tend to rely more on digital platforms for environmental information, while older generations value personal experiences and traditional sources like family and education.

Secondly, the study found that education levels are also significantly related to the choice of environmental awareness sources. Illiterate participants appeared to rely heavily on their own experiences, whereas those with a 12th-grade education placed more importance on family and friends. In contrast, graduates and individuals with higher education levels favored educational institutions and family and friends as their sources. These findings are consistent with the research by Kara et al. (2011), which emphasized the role of education in shaping environmental attitudes and highlighted the influence of social networks on environmental awareness, especially among less-educated individuals.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the data from this study underscores the importance of tailoring environmental awareness campaigns in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, to the specific demographics of the target audience. Younger individuals may benefit more from digital and experiential initiatives, while older individuals may respond better to educational and community-based approaches. Furthermore, educational programs should consider the varying educational backgrounds of their audience when designing their communication strategies. By understanding these nuances, policymakers and environmental organizations can develop more effective strategies to promote eco-consciousness in the region.

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