

Association of Socioeconomic Status and Pro-Environmental Behaviors in the Citizens of Gorgan, Iran (2017)

Danial Bagheri¹, Reza Ali Mohseni^{2*}, Seyed Mohammad Sadegh Mahdavi³

1. PhD Candidate in Sociology, Islamic Azad University, Babol Branch, Babol, Iran. 0000-0002-8100-9204
2. Associate Professor, School of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, School of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Babol Branch, Babol, Iran
3. Professor, School of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Babol Branch, Babol, Iran. 0000-0002-1285-464X

Abstract

Background and objectives: Environmental pollution is a major cause of various diseases. Massive production of hospital, industrial and household wastes lead to several health issues, threatening community health on a daily basis. The present study aimed to determine the association between socioeconomic status and pro-environmental behaviors in the citizens of Gorgan, Iran.

Methods: This cross-sectional, descriptive-analytical study was conducted on 400 citizens of Gorgan. Participants were divided into three regions based on urban categorization. Data were collected using demographic and socioeconomic questionnaires. To assess environmental behaviors, a standard questionnaire was used based on the Dunlap spectrum. Data analysis was performed in SPSS version 16 using the analysis of variance (ANOVA), independent samples t-test and factor analysis.

Results: No positive significant correlation was observed between gender and environmental behaviors. The results of ANOVA showed a significant association between marital status and environmental behaviors. In addition, the results of factor analysis indicated that five factors explained 55.49% of environmental behaviors. The results of ANOVA also demonstrated that middle-class citizens had a more responsible attitude toward the environment compared to others ($P<0.05$).

Conclusion: According to the results, socioeconomic status influenced the social value orientations and responsible behaviors of individuals toward the environment. Therefore, increasing the quality of life and providing comprehensive education could enhance pro-environmental behaviors and promote community health.

Keywords: Socioeconomic status, Pro-Environmental behaviors, Ecological paradigm, Gorgan

Corresponding Author: Reza Ali Mohseni

Address: School of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, School of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Babol Branch, Babol, Iran

E-mail: alireza1063@gmail.com

Introduction

Environmental problems are among the most pressing issues faced by the human society in the modern era. Researchers have been concerned about finding sustainable solutions in this regard (1). The increasing trends of population growth and consumption rates are considered to be the main causes of excessive resource exploitation (2).

Prominent environmental sociology scholars, such as Dunlap and Van Liere (3), Dunlap and Jones (4), Ayodeji (5), Buttel (6), Schahn and Holzer (7) and Salehi (8) have investigated the influential factors on environmental behaviors including demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, social class, place of residence, marital status), political orientation, social ideology, environmental performance of nations, environmental knowledge and religious beliefs (9).

Pro-environmental behaviors are defined as the responses of community members to the environment, which involve a wide range of feelings, tendencies, and specific preparations for interacting with the environment. In every community, individuals have different attitudes to the environment based on their specific social and cultural conditions. In general, positive behaviors toward the environment are those not causing any harm, even if not protecting the environment (10).

Explaining responsible environmental behaviors is possible through reviewing the socioeconomic status and attitudinal and individual perceptions, as well as the opportunities available for environmental behaviors in communities. According to the literature, socioeconomic and cultural conditions play a pivotal role in the

environmental behaviors of community members (11, 13). In addition, the socioeconomic status of community members largely influences the emergence of the pro-environmental behaviors that affect health. Due to the diversity of societies and profound impact of the society's structure and basic cultural factors in this regard, proper social relations and policymaking cannot be established (14).

On a large scale, the ability of organizations to manage solid waste is an effective component of health promotion. On the other hand, urban growth has currently imposed drastic pressure on the environment, as well as the health of community members. One of the most important consequences of this growth is migration to cities and the uncontrolled growth of suburbanization. In addition, individual factors play a key role in sustainable development.

The present study aimed to assess the knowledge and attitude of individuals toward energy use and waste recycling and investigate the association of socioeconomic status and pro-environmental behaviors in the citizens of Gorgan, Iran.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive-analytical research was conducted on 400 citizens (191 women and 209 men) in Gorgan, Iran in 2017. Data were collected using the field method. In addition, data collection tools included a self-report questionnaire including the occupation status, education level and social class of the subjects, with five main questions to assess the socioeconomic status (SES). Content and face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by 12 experts, and its reliability was estimated at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 (15). The main data collection tool for assessing pro-environmental behaviors was

based on the questionnaire by Stern (16) and Milfont and Duckitt (17).

Subjects were selected via random sampling. After determining the sample size using cluster sampling, the citizens of Gorgan were divided into three categories based on urban classification. All the questionnaires were anonymous, and data were collected directly from the citizens.

Data analysis was performed in SPSS version 16 using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), inferential statistics (independent t-test for the mean comparison of the two groups), analysis of variance (ANOVA) and factor analysis. P-values lower than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Results

Among the participants, 52.2% were male and 47.8% were female. Mean age of the subjects was 33.31±9.69 years (range=17-62 years). In terms of marital status, 31.8% of the participants were single, 55.5% were married and 12.7% were widowed or divorced. Regarding education status, 27% of the subjects had high school diploma or an associate degree, 48.3% were above diploma/had bachelor’s degree and 24.7% had master’s degree (or higher). In terms of occupation status, 39.3% were unemployed or job seekers, 10.7% had part-time jobs and 50% were employed (Table 1)

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable		Number	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	191	47.8
	Male	209	52.2
Age (year)	<20	39	9.76
	21-30	119	29.7
	31-40	128	32.1
	41-50	62	15.5
	>50	52	13.1
Marital Status	Single	127	31.8
	Married	222	55.5
	No Spouse	51	12.7
Education Level	Diploma/Below Diploma	108	27.0
	Associate Degree/Bachelor’s Degree	193	48.3
	Master’s Degree (or higher)	99	24.7
Occupation Status	Unemployed/Job Seeker	157	39.3
	Part-Time Job	43	10.7
	Full-Time Job	200	50.0

The results of independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between the male and female participants in terms of pro-environmental behaviors (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Pro-Environmental Behaviors in Citizens Based on Gender

Variable	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	P-value
Water Consumption	Female	16.97	4.31	0.82
	Male	16.87	4.37	
Attitude toward Waste Recycling	Female	16.29	3.96	0.56
	Male	16.02	4.14	
Energy Consumption	Female	14.64	3.34	0.82
	Male	14.55	4.98	
Pollutants	Female	10.55	2.78	0.92
	Male	10.58	2.35	
Avoiding Waste Production	Female	11.95	2.71	0.76
	Male	12.02	2.43	

According to the results of ANOVA, there was a significant difference in the pro-environmental behaviors of the citizens in terms of the marital status. Married subjects received a higher score in pro-environmental behaviors in all the factors (water consumption, attitude toward waste recycling, energy consumption, pollutants, and avoiding waste production). Moreover, single subjects had a more efficient performance in this regard compared to those without a spouse (Table 3).

In the present study, environmental behaviors were the dependent variable in five dimensions of water consumption, attitude toward waste recycling, energy use, pollutants, and avoiding waste production with 20 items which were scored based on a Likert scale.

According to the information in Table 3, the results of ANOVA showed a correlation between the SES of the participants and water consumption. The level of water consumption was higher in the lower class compared to the middle class. In addition, citizens of high social classes had higher water consumption compared to the middle class. With regard to the attitude toward waste recycling, a correlation was observed between the SES of the respondents and their attitudes. On the other hand, citizens of the lower class had poor attitudes toward waste recycling. Citizens of the middle-class had better attitudes in this regard (mean: 16.76) compared to the higher class (mean: 16).

The results of ANOVA revealed an association between energy use and SES of the respondents. Correspondingly, lower class citizen wasted more energy than other social classes, while higher class citizens wasted less energy compared to the lower class citizens.

In the analysis of the fourth factor, a correlation was observed between the SES of the respondents and 'green behavior' (i.e., no use of pollutants), so that lower class citizens had the least consideration of using pollutants. According to the results of ANOVA, there was an association between the SES of the respondents and avoiding waste production. In this regard, lower class citizens produced the highest volume of waste, whereas the middle-class citizens produced the lowest level of waste (Table 4).

Table 3. Comparison of Pro-Environmental Behaviors of Citizens Based on Marital Status

Variable	Marital Status	Mean	Standard Deviation	ANOVA (Sig)	Tukey's Test (Sig)		
					Married-Single	Married-Divorced/S	Married-Divorced/Widowed/
Water Consumption	Single	15.68	4.32	0.000			
	Married	18.35	3.90		0.000	0.017	0.000
	No Spouse	13.78	3.63				
Attitude toward Waste Recycling	Single	14.46	4.31	0.000	0.000	0.930	0.000
	Married	17.53	3.50				
	No Spouse	14.23	3.37				
Energy Consumption	Single	13.78	5.91	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.000
	Married	15.63	2.90				
	Widowed/divorced	12.12	2.76				
Pollutants	Single	9.96	2.54	0.000	0.000	0.014	0.000
	Married	11.30	2.40				
	No Spouse	8.80	2.06				
Avoiding Waste Production	Single	10.85	3.00	0.000	0.000	0.626	0.000
	Married	12.96	1.83				
	No Spouse	10.48	3.38				

In the current research, Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling were applied to evaluate the adequacy of the correlations between the variables. Considering that the KMO value was equal to 0.91 and more than 0.6, it could be concluded that the correlation value was sufficient and the number of the samples to perform factor analysis was appropriate.

In the present study, the value of Bartlett's sphericity was 3176.229 at the significance level of 0.000. Therefore, there was a correlation between the questions of each of the aforementioned factors and separation of the factors was carried out accurately. The factor loads were rotated using the Varimax method. In factor analysis, low level of anti-image correlation-coefficient was indicative of high, modified correlations between the

variables. Therefore, factor analysis could be performed with a high reliability (Table 5).

The value of communalities, which is statistically equal to the coefficient of the regression model, demonstrated the accuracy and fitness of predicting each variable. The items regarding pro-environmental behaviors (n=20) were reduced to five factors of water consumption, attitude toward waste recycling, energy use, pollutants, and avoiding waste production, and the total variance of these factors was estimated at 55.487.

Table 4. Comparison of Pro-Environmental Behaviors in Citizens of Gorgan, Iran Based on Socioeconomic Status

Variable	Social Class	Mean	Standard Deviation	F-value	Analysis of Variance (P-value)	Comparison of Social Classes with Tukey's Test (P-value)		
						Middle-Low	High-Low	High-Middle
Water Consumption	Lower Class	15.68	4.13	9.56	0.000			
	Middle Class	17.94	4.22			0.000	0.190	0.031
	Higher Class	16.66	4.38					
Attitude toward Waste Recycling	Lower Class	15.41	4.10	3.84	0.022			
	Middle Class	16.76	4.03			0.019	0.509	0.244
	Higher Class	16.00	3.94					
Energy Consumption	Lower Class	13.32	3.36	7.31	0.001			
	Middle Class	15.30	5.08			0.001	0.028	0.517
	Higher Class	14.75	3.51					
Pollutants	Lower Class	9.59	2.12	11.17	0.000			
	Middle Class	10.88	2.73			0.000	0.000	0.932
	Higher Class	10.99	2.47					
Avoiding Waste Production	Lower class	11.35	2.84	6.22	0.002			
	Middle Class	12.45	2.27			0.001	0.211	0.176
	Higher Class	11.91	2.58					

Table 5. Results of Factor Analysis Related to the Components of Environmental Behavior

Dependent Variable	Aspects of Dependent Variables	Explained Variance	Percentage of Explained Variance
Pro-Environmental Behaviors	Water Consumption	12.781	55.487
	Attitude toward Waste Recycling	11.830	
	Energy Consumption	9.212	
	Pollutants	9.876	
	Avoiding waste Production	11.788	

Discussion

Population growth and urbanization have caused numerous environmental problems, which pose a significant risk to human health (18). In this regard, the role of the social, economic, and cultural factors involved in the life of citizens of different social classes is of great importance. The present study aimed to evaluate the correlation between the SES and pro-environmental behaviors of the citizens in Gorgan city, Iran.

According to the results of the present study, the male and female subjects were homogeneous in terms of pro-environmental behaviors. This finding is in line with the results obtained by Haghghian (19) and Hajizadeh Meymandi et al. (23), while inconsistent with the findings of Mokhtari et al. (24). Most of the studies based on ecofeminism have proposed that women have better environmental behaviors compared to men, which was not confirmed in the present study.

In the current research, a significant correlation was observed between marital status and pro-environmental behaviors. Accordingly, married individuals had comparatively more responsible attitudes toward the environment in all the five factors (water consumption, attitude toward waste recycling, energy use, pollutants, and avoiding waste production). In this regard, our findings are in congruence with the results obtained by Karatasou (25) and Imam Gholi (23).

As a dependent variable, we divided environmental behaviors into five factors and separately evaluated the impact of all the SES components on these factors. According to the results, there was an association between SES and water consumption of the participants, which is in line with the studies by Salehi (26) and Ghaemi (37).

According to the current research, higher environmental attitudes were associated with better attitudes toward waste recycling. The results obtained by Abbaszadeh et al. (27), Amanpour (28), Best (29), and Czajkowski (30) also showed a positive correlation between the attitude of individuals toward the environment and pro-environmental behaviors.

In the present study, the components relating to energy consumption were combined and evaluated as a single factor. A significant correlation was denoted between energy consumption and the pro-environmental behaviors of the respondents, which is consistent with the results obtained by Karatasou (25), Karimzadeh, and Poortinga (31).

Similarly, the components relating to pollutants were integrated and evaluated as a single factor, and a significant association was observed between avoiding pollutants and pro-environmental behaviors in the participants. In this regard, the findings of Sajadian et al. (32), Tu and Lin (33), and Amanpour (28) were mainly focused on the development of cities and current pollutants in urban living.

In the present study, a significant association was observed between avoiding waste production and pro-environmental behaviors in the participants. This variable could partly demonstrate the sense of belonging of the citizens to the environment. In this regard, our findings are in line with the results obtained by Kalantari et al. (34), Aghaei (35), and Rastegarnejhad (36).

Findings of the current research indicated that human factors play a key role in the production and recycling of waste. On the other hand, the SES of individuals, including education level, occupation status, and perceptions of individuals toward the socioeconomic and cultural facilities of the society, could influence their values and

responsible behaviors toward the environment. Therefore, analysis and recognition of the attitudes and belongings of citizens could largely contribute to proper planning for waste management and recycling.

Conclusion

Many citizens in Gorgan city have a tendency to perform environmental behaviors, especially the middle class, which constitutes the largest population in Gorgan similar to other cities. However, these behaviors appear to be in conflict with the urban ecosystem due to the lack of knowledge and unwanted environmental behaviors. Therefore, it is possible to liberate human societies from the issues arising from the unsanitary disposal of solid wastes through establishing proper regulations and health-related programs and formulating sustainable development policies for collecting, separating, transporting, disposing, and recycling hospital, industrial, and household wastes.

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ارتباط مؤلفه‌های اجتماعی - اقتصادی با رفتار حامی محیط زیست شهروندان شهر گرگان در سال ۱۳۹۶

دانیال باقری^۱، رضاعلی محسنی^{۲*}، سید محمدصادق مهدوی^۳

۱. دانشجوی دکترای جامعه‌شناسی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد بابل، بابل، ایران
۲. دانشیار، دانشکده علوم انسانی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد تهران مرکزی، دانشکده علوم انسانی دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد بابل، بابل، ایران
۳. استاد، دانشکده علوم انسانی دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد بابل، بابل، ایران

چکیده:

زمینه و هدف: آلودگی‌های زیست محیطی یکی از مهم‌ترین عوامل بروز بیماری‌ها است. تولید حجم انبوهی از زباله‌های بیمارستانی، صنعتی و خانگی به طور روزانه ایجاد کننده معضلات بهداشتی و تهدید کننده سلامت جوامع است. این مطالعه به منظور تعیین ارتباط متغیرهای اجتماعی-اقتصادی با عملکرد زیست محیطی شهروندان شهر گرگان انجام شده است.

روش بررسی: این مطالعه توصیفی-تحلیلی به روش مقطعی روی ۴۰۰ نفر از شهروندان شهر گرگان انجام شد. شهروندان شهر گرگان به ۳ منطقه بر اساس تقسیم بندی شهری تقسیم و اطلاعات دریافت شده مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت. ابزارهای مورد استفاده جهت جمع‌آوری داده‌ها شامل پرسشنامه جمعیت‌شناختی و وضعیت اجتماعی-اقتصادی بود. برای سنجش رفتارهای حامی محیط زیست از پرسشنامه‌ی استاندارد بر اساس طیف دانلاپ استفاده شد. تحلیل داده‌ها با نرم افزار آماری ۱۶ Spss و آنالیز واریانس و آزمون T مستقل و تحلیل عاملی انجام شد.

یافته‌ها: نتایج تحقیق نشان داد بین جنسیت با رفتار حامی محیط زیست رابطه معنی دار و مثبتی وجود نداشت. تحلیل واریانس رابطه معنی داری بین وضعیت تأهل با رفتارهای حامی محیط زیست نشان داد ($P < 0/05$). نتایج تحلیل عاملی نشان داد که ۵ عامل مصرف آب، نگرش به بازیافت، مصرف انرژی، آلاینده‌ها و پرهیز از تولید زباله به میزان ۵۵/۴۸۷ درصد رفتار زیست محیطی را تبیین کرد. نتایج تحلیل واریانس نشان داد شهروندانی که به لحاظ اجتماعی-اقتصادی در طبقه متوسط بودند رفتار مسئولانه تری در قبال محیط زیست داشتند ($P < 0/05$).

نتیجه گیری: وضعیت اجتماعی-اقتصادی افراد در میزان جهت گیری‌های ارزشی و رفتارهای مسئولانه در قبال محیط زیست مؤثر است. افزایش سطح کیفیت زندگی و آموزش‌های فراگیر موجب بروز رفتارهای حامی محیط زیست و ارتقاء سطح بهداشت و سلامت جامعه می‌گردد.

کلمات کلیدی: مؤلفه‌های اجتماعی-اقتصادی، رفتار زیست محیطی، پارادایم نوین اکولوژیکی، شهر گرگان

نویسنده مسئول: رضاعلی محسنی

آدرس: دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد تهران مرکزی، تهران، ایران.

ایمیل: alireza1063@gmail.com