

Psychology and Life

Environmental psychology: deals with various psychological issues pertaining to human-environment (everything that surrounds us: physical, social, work and cultural) interaction in a very broad sense.

Ecology: is the study of the relationship between living beings and their environment and their interdependence.

Environment can be of two types:

1. **Natural** (untouched by human intervention. Eg. Natural resources, air, water, earth, flora and fauna)
2. **Built** (created by human being Eg. Cities, houses, parks, shopping malls etc)

The Built Environment involves concept of Environmental design which contains some psychological features, such as:

- **Creativity of human mind:** work of architects, town planners, civil engineers.
- **Human control over natural environment:** building of dams to regulate the flow of rivers.
- **Impact of design on social interaction:** Distance between houses in a colony, placement of rooms in a house and desks in a class, chair in a get together.

Different views/approaches of the Human- Environment Relationship

1. **Minimalistic Perspective:** This approach assumes minimal or negligible influence of physical environment on human beings (behaviour, health and wellbeing). They exist as parallel components. **No relationship**
2. **Instrumental Perspective:** Suggests that physical environment exists for the consumption of human beings for their comfort and well being. Material and **instrumental relationship**. Eg. Awareness campaigns on saving the environment for ur future generations.
3. **Spiritual Perspective:** Refers to the view of Environment as something to be respected and valued rather than destroyed and exploited. Reflects the **interdependence between the two**.



Eg Chipko movement custom in Bishnoi community to save environment.

Bishnois and the Chipko Movement:

Bishnois a small community in Rajasthan value their trees and wildlife as much as their lives. They would do anything to protect their trees including hugging to them if they were threatened. The destroyer cannot cut the trees until he destroys their bodies.

This was first practiced to start a movement against felling of trees in 1960 when the government was unable to curb this. It became intense after the 1970 floods and was a protest against stopping unlawful felling of trees, soil erosion, preventing floods and landslides. As their livelihood was dependent on the forests.

It included six demands:

1. Only specific trees and vegetation suitable to geographical region should be grown.
2. Forests in soil erosion and landslide zones to be renewed and protected.
3. Those who have been living near the forests and depending on them should be allowed to live there.
4. The contractor system for commercial timber exploitation should be abolished.
5. Useful trees for villagers should be planted near the villages.
6. Village cottage industry based on minor forest products should be set up to provide jobs to locals.

Environmental Effects on Human Behaviour:

- **On Perception:** e.g. a tribal society in Africa build their houses circular without angular walls. They show less errors in geometric illusions.
- **On Emotions:** watching flowing river, blooming flower or a tranquil mountain provides unmatched joy whereas environmental natural disasters like floods, drought, landslides or earthquakes can affect humans to an extent that they can feel deep depression and sorrow at times Post-traumatic stress disorder.



- **On occupation , living style and attitudes:** e.g. Environment and ecology impacts the occupation leading to certain living styles and attitudes:

Plains with water bodies, rivers around- Agriculture and farming- Cooperative and group dependence. (Also dependent on monsoon- another environmental feature)

Deserts- Industry, mining, minerals- More independent and competitive, less dependence on group.

Mountains- Hunting gathering, shepherds etc- Seasonal working due to extreme weather (winter/snow) in the mountains

Human influence on environment:

- Taking natural resources for daily lives.
- Damaging and harming nature by creating pollution and producing nature harming products (smoke, chemicals, constructions)
- Environment stressors harming nature and in turn harming themselves. (Felling trees, excessive mining leading to soil erosion and landslides damaging and disrupting human lives)

Environment damaging effects:

All types of pollution: Water, air, environmental pollution by poisonous gases, smoke fumes and harmful chemicals from industry and unprocessed garbage, polythenes from homes.

Noise pollution: Impact of noise pollution is basis – **intensity, predictability** and **controllability** :

- In a simple mental task noise does not affect overall performance.
- If task is interesting, noise does not impact much
- When noise is unpredictable it impacts more than when it is predictable we get used to it.

Pollution: Garbage, harmful chemicals, fumes, smoke, contaminated water/groundwater, acid rain etc.

Crowding: Discomfort, privacy lapse, claustrophobic, aggression in behaviour

- Crowding may lead to abnormal behaviour and aggression
- Lowered performance in difficult tasks that involve cognitive processes.
- Low academic performance by children grown in excessive crowded households.
- Nature of the social interaction also decide how an individual will react to the crowd.
- Different degree of impact of crowd to different individuals based on tolerance levels.
- Cultural characteristics and beliefs may determine the extent to which a particular environment is judged to be subjectively crowded. Cultures promoting group living and collectivism finds crowds more acceptable than those which promote individualism.
- Crowding impacts Personal Space also which each individual likes to create around himself /herself.

Interpersonal Physical distance: In social situation, the physical distance people like to maintain while interacting with the other person is called Interpersonal Physical distance. **Types of this are defined as follows:**

- **Intimate Distance:** (upto 18 inches)- Privately with close friends and relatives.
- **Personal distance :** (18 inches to 4 ft) interacting one-on-one in a social situation.
- **Social distance:** (4 ft to 10 ft) in formal interaction.
- **Public Distance:** (10ft to infinity). Distance in a formal setting.

Natural Disaster: leading to immense human lives and property damage

1. **Natural unaided by human beings:** Floods, epidemics, hurricanes, tornados, tsunami, volcanic eruptions, forest fires etc.
2. **Human aided natural disasters:** Floods, global warming, forest fires can be also due to mining and cutting trees.



3. Other disasters: wars, industrial accidents such as leaking of poisonous or radioactive gases, atomic bombs and use of destructive weapons, epidemics (plague 1994).

These disasters not only lead to damage to human lives, other living beings and property, they also lead to psychological disorders called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which need to be understood and remedied.

These disorders have following features:

- **The immediate reaction:** disorientation, denial and inability to assess the damage.
- **Physical Reaction:** Bodily exhaustion, difficulty sleeping, change in eating pattern increased heartbeat and blood pressure.
- **Emotional Reaction:** Grief, fear, irritability, anger (why this should happen to me), helplessness, hopelessness, depression, absolute lack of emotions (numbness), guilt, lack of interest in daily livelihood.
- **Cognitive Reaction:** worry, difficulty in concentration, reduced attention span, memory loss, confusion, nightmares.
- **Social Reaction:** withdrawal from others, getting into conflicts, arguments without any major reason, feeling of being rejected and left out by loved ones.

All such people need to undergo healing through remedial process. With proper counselling and psychiatric treatments they can overcome the psychological impact of the disaster. The intensity of treatment and results depend on:

- The intensity of the loss due to disaster.
- The individual's coping ability
- Other stressful experiences before disaster and support system he has.

Though most natural disasters can only be predicted in a limited way. There are ways of being prepared to minimize their devastating impact:

- **Warnings-** being announced on radio/TV media to stay away from sea or move to safer places, when some natural disaster like cyclone, flood etc are predicted.



- **Safety measures-** In places where some disasters can be predicted, they can still happen suddenly..like earthquake prone areas. Safety tip are issued from time to time and measures are taken to build houses etc to withstand such disasters.
- **Treatment of psychological disorders-**
 - **1st Step:** providing material help (food, clothing, shelter, medical help etc)
 - **2nd Step:** Counselling at group or individual level. (encouraging the survivors to talk about their experiences, giving them time to heal.)
 - **3rd Step-** Self efficacy : making them develop attitude that I can do it. I can come out of this phase.
 - **4th Step-** Rehabilitation: in the form of employment and a gradual return to normal routine.
 - **5th Step:** Follow up of victims is also needed periodically.

Promoting Pro- Environmental Behaviour:

1. Reducing air-pollution- Non fuel vehicle, stopping smoking
2. Reducing noise pollution- Discouraging needless honking, keeping noise levels low, and restriction on noisy music after certain hours.
3. Managing disposal of garbage disposal- Separating biodegradable garbage, composting kitchen waste, managing industrial /hospital waste.
4. Planting trees and ensuring care- while avoiding those trees/plans which may be harmful for health.
5. Saying No to plastics- reducing toxic waste
6. Reducing Non- biodegradable packaging of consumers' goods.
7. Laws related to construction that violate optimal environmental design.

Psychology and Social concerns/problems:

Poverty: is a condition in which there is a lack of necessities of life in the context of unequal distribution of wealth in society. It refers to an actual shortage of resources necessary for living and thus can be objectively measured.



Deprivation: is a state in which a person **feels** that s/he has lost something valuable and is not getting something that s/he deserves. Since it is more of a **perception and thinking** so its not only the poor who may feel deprived, others too.

Social Disadvantage: is a condition where some segments of society are not allowed to enjoy the same privileges as the rest of society. It poses an obstacle to the growth of these disadvantaged sections. E.g.- Caste, Poverty, religion etc.

Discrimination: refers to the behaviour that makes a distinction between the rich and the poor. Favouring the rich and advantaged over the poor and disadvantaged- in social interaction, employment, health facilities and education, despite the capability.

This creates a vicious cycle, lack of good economic status deprives them from good schools and education and hence adversely impacts their employability and in turn continues to keep them under the poverty line.

Psychological Characteristics and Effects of poverty and deprivation:

On Motivation, personality, social behaviour, cognitive processes and mental health:

- Motivation: Low on aspiration and low motivation for achievement. They lack believe in themselves and their ability and attribute their successes to fate or luck.
- Personality: Have low self esteem. High on anxiety and introversion. Dwell on immediate present than future oriented, prefer short immediate rewards than more in the long run. They live with a sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, injustice, loss of identity.
- Social behaviour: The poor and deprived exhibit an attitude of resentment.
- Cognitive functioning: also gets affected due to prolonged deprivation. Which is mainly due to environment than mental ability: Classification, verbal reasoning, time and pictorial depth perception)
- Mental Health: Deprived people may face more mental illnesses and depression due to constant worrying about basic necessities and sense of hopelessness.

Major Causes of Poverty:

- Natural disasters causing property resources damage.



- Man Made disasters- poisonous gas leakage, wars
- Poor themselves- When they lack the ability and motivation to turn around their status.
- Culture of poverty- convinces the individual that s/he will remain poor.
- Economic, social and political factors leaving poor people out, subjected to social injustice, deprivation, discrimination and exclusion.
- Geographical- Deserts, harsh climates.
- Poverty cycle- Poverty begets poverty: Beginning with meagre means> lack of education> lack of resources>low skills> low income> low motivation> continued poverty.

Majors for Poverty Alleviation-

- Breaking the poverty cycle and helping the people attain self-sufficiency. (financial, medical and resources to help them earn and develop livelihood and not become dependent on the aid)
- Creating a context for making the poor take the responsibility instead of blaming the circumstances.
- Providing education and employment opportunities, following the principles of social justice. This will help in reducing the crime and violence due to frustration.
- Measures for improving mental health. Many of the poverty reduction measures improve the physical health.
- Steps for empowering the poor.

Antyodaya: Rise of the last person in the society.

Under these programs there is provision for health facilities, nutrition, education and training for employment.

More in rural than urban as they lack resources. Poor are encouraged to start their own with initial capital that is provided through small loans/micro credit facilities.

1. Grameen bank in Bangladesh.ActionAid- an international group dedicated to the cause of making the poor more sensitive to their rights, to equality and justice, ensuring adequate nutrition, health and facilities for education and employment.



Aggression, Violence and Peace:

This is another disorder, which is a major problem in today's society.

Aggression: is a behaviour by one person/persons that is intended to cause harm to another person/s. Can be demonstrated by using harsh words, criticism or even hostile feelings against others.

Violence: Forceful destructive behaviour towards another person or object is described as violence.

Difference between the two: Aggression involves the intention to harm or injure the other person, whereas violence may or may not have such intention.

Aggression is of 2 types:

Instrumental Aggression: is an act of aggression meant to achieve a certain goal or object. E.g. a bully in the class bullies new students to snatch their chocolates etc.

Hostile Aggression: Expression of anger towards a target with an intention of harming him/her not obtaining out of the victim.

Causes of aggression: Theory I

1. Inborn tendency (its an inborn biological tendency of human-beings and animals created for self-defence)
2. Physiological mechanism: Annoying , frustrating situations, hot and humid weather, crowding can cause one to get aggressive.
3. Child rearing: If parents have been using physical punishments to control and discipline children, they have the tendency to get aggressive.
4. Frustration: When a person is prevented from achieving/reaching his goal, attaining the object he really wants.

Displacement: is a phenomenon where the aggressor usually chooses a weaker person to express anger who is less likely or unable to react back aggressively.

Causes of aggression: Theory II



Learning: Individuals exhibit aggression as they may find it rewarding as getting their work done faster and getting what they want. Hence they learn through direct reinforcement.

Observing an Aggressive model: A child watching aggression and violence on TV may start imitating.

Anger provoking action: Watching and observing the act of someone insulting, threatening, inappropriate act against weak (women/children), dishonesty, can lead to causing viewer display aggression.

Availability of weapons to express anger: It is observed that if the weapons like knife, gun and stick are available the chances of aggression converting to violence are higher.

Personality Factors: Naturally hot tempered. Eg weak people with low esteem may display aggression to boost their self-esteem and ego.

Also people with very high self-esteem may get aggressive when they feel they are not getting what they deserve.

Cultural factors: in some cultures children and young members are reared teaching them to be aggressive and are praised for displaying that behaviour. Whereas some peace-loving tribes may not appreciate aggression.

Strategies to reduce aggression and violence:

- **Parenting/teaching:** Parents /teachers taking care that they don't encourage the aggressive behaviour and use physical punishments to discipline the children.
- **Reduce opportunities to observe and watch aggressive behaviour:** Children to not be exposed to media, books, cinema carrying violent and aggressive content during formative years.
- **Poverty and social justice:** Poverty and deprivation being prominent causes of aggression and violence should be addressed in the society and social justice should be implemented to lessen situations that cause frustration.
- **Positive attitude towards peace**

Health: biological, psychological and social well being.

Impacted by attitudes, beliefs and behaviours associated with physical wellbeing.



1. Cognition: Different people behave differently in addressing physical wellbeing. Some consult doctors for even small ailments like cough and cold, whereas some choose to ignore even serious problems and delay consulting.
2. Level of awareness: knowing about problems and causes can help address them more effectively than being ignorant.
3. Behaviour: Lifestyle related problems and behaviours we indulge into can cause health issues: smoking, drinking alcohol, drug abuse and unsafe sex. Problems related to agronomic issues.
4. Social and Cultural factors: social and cultural differences may influence psychological responses. In Asian, African society's gender, age and roles also impact the state of health. Especially women in our societies, as they may not be given importance or are expected to be hardy.

Influence of TV:

1. A powerful medium for providing large amounts of information in an interesting way and visual form. On one side it helps retain things and gain information faster but reduces reading, writing habits and outdoor activities.
2. While the televised content can help develop a deeper understanding for creating and developing things by watching, it also distracts young viewers and interfere with their ability to concentrate on one target and social interactions.
3. Can inculcate aggressive and violent behaviours if the content watched of that nature due to higher ability to influence due to visual media. Alternately, can also reduce aggression by watching it as it may create dislike for that seeing consequences. It is referred as
4. Can encourage consumerist attitude by watching the advertisements and promotion of several objects and options in those.

