

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ECOPSYCHOLOGY

Dr. Nikita Agrawal*

ABSTRACT

Human psychology has grown significantly in recent years, and this evolution has brought about a profound realisation: we need to treat mental illness with the same seriousness that we treat physical illnesses. People increasingly understand how important it is to take care of their mental health, and awareness of psychological wellbeing is growing. Thus, it is imperative that we recognise that mother nature is an integral part of our being, just as our physical and mental well-being, and begin taking steps to inspire us to protect her. Achieving a sustainable lifestyle requires striking a balance between human consumption and the natural world's capacity for renewal. We must make our existence meaningful and make it our main goal to live for the prosperity of our future generations, as stated in the quotation by Fyodor Dostoyesky that reads, "The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for." The goal of this study is to determine how psychology and environment may work together to develop sustainable living practices by utilising their respective ideas. Among the main subjects being examined are the gaps in psychology's understanding of environmental and sustainability factors, the effects of human behaviour on the environment, actions that psychologists can take to inspire sustainable development, potential challenges for psychologists, etc.

Keywords: Human Psychology, Physical Illnesses, Mental Health, Psychological Wellbeing.

Introduction

The idea of sustainable development and environmental wellbeing first emerged in the middle of the 20th century. As people became more aware of the negative effects of human activity—such as industrialization, urbanisation, population growth, and technological advancements—they began to take this issue seriously in order to ensure their own and future generations' survival. In order to uphold their moral obligations to the environment and our society, a number of industries, including manufacturing, business, hospitality, education, healthcare, and many more, have attempted to make their operations more environmentally friendly.

Similarly, the subject of psychology should also be involved in this issue provide a helping hand towards the resolution of this problem. In this research, the main objective would be to examine scope of psychology in facilitating sustainable development and also the implication of ecopsychology i.e., a psychological approach to sustainability and environmental welfare.

Some broad highlights of this study are as follows:

- Psychologists can contribute a lot to sustainable development by studying human tendencies and reactions regarding sustainable behaviour i.e., how people think about sustainability, are they ignorant about it or are they totally against it due to some reason. They can also analyse human thought process after conducting a sustainable action, do they feel satisfied or do they regret it. There are many more ways to indulge psychological body of knowledge to sustainability and improve our views and actions as a whole.
- Seven themes that constitute a part of environmental psychology have been discussed here and also how the growth and maturation can take place built on these seven themes.

* Assistant Professor, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, New Delhi, India.

- The analysis concerning the conceptual framework about the social determinants of mental diseases that is in line with the SDGs, the comprehensive examination of the data for these social determinants, and the identification of possible mechanisms and intervention targets.
- A glimpse of new psychological instrument for evaluation of sustainability and looking into the sustainable development goals psychological inventory.

Psychology is a vast topic regarding human mentality but this study will be more focused on how it can incorporate ecological studies with its main subject matter and develop more on the environmental front as a subject.

Modern psychologists have a great potential of addressing sustainability as it is a major concern these days. People working in research field can contribute by conducting depth studies on ecopsychology. Introducing sustainability and environmental content in relation to psychology in the curriculum will also help in creating awareness and if this step experiences tremendous growth and development, ecopsychology might come out to be a commendable profession.

Literature Review

P Schmuck and C Vlek (2003) concluded that the significance of psychology in comprehending and facilitating sustainable development is underscored in UN's Agenda 21 and other UN publications. The leading global challenges, namely population growth and atmospheric warming, are predominantly influenced by human consumption patterns and production technologies. Psychological contributions play a crucial role in addressing various aspects, including effective communication of environmental risks, understanding human responses to environmental stress, analyzing behavioral processes and causation, assessing the feasibility of sustainable lifestyles, supporting policy decision-making, and implementing behavior-change initiatives. To ensure comprehensive contributions, cognitivism and behaviorism should serve as foundational frameworks, while considering emotional aspects and quality of life. These contributions should adopt both individual and social perspectives, emphasizing the promotion of cooperation for the collective well-being. Policies and techniques that have been universally agreed upon, including adopting psychological concepts, may serve as a guide for the goals and paths of sustainable development. Psychologists need to investigate the social dimensions of human life, including how people behave in relation to shared facilities, structures, and characteristics.

According to **Robert Gifford (2007)** Environmental psychology holds a vital position within the realm of sustainability science, effectively navigating the realms of pessimism and cautious optimism. Pessimism stems from the notion that a significant portion of individuals already act in alignment with sustainable practices, while cautious optimism implies that resources are not intrinsically problematic. Nevertheless, those who recognize the urgency of environmental issues are compelled to actively seek solutions. As an integral component of sustainability science, environmental psychology contributes indispensably by rectifying excessive self-interest and fostering the adoption of sustainable behaviors. The articles featured in this special edition are aimed at advancing and expanding the frontiers of this discipline.

The interrelated matters of mental disorders and environmental degradation necessitate collaborative endeavors on a global scale, involving governments, civil societies, and the private sector. Mitigating these challenges can aid in dismantling detrimental cycles of poverty, violence, and environmental degradation, ultimately fostering mental well-being and advancing sustainable development. [C Brooke-Sumner, F Baingana et. Al. (2018)]

Numerous scholars contend that establishing a psychological bond with nature is imperative for attaining sustainability. This viewpoint posits that the achievement of sustainability relies on intensifying the psychological interconnectedness between individuals and the natural environment. Empirical investigations indicate that heightened inclusion is correlated with greater concern for the well-being of plants and animals, increased nurturance of nature, and a higher propensity to engage in behaviors aimed at mitigating the impact of human activities on the natural environment. However, diminished inclusion may prompt specific pro-environmental behaviors when such behaviors yield personal benefits. While a path to sustainability driven by egoism is theoretically possible, it appears improbable given society's reliance on technology. The fundamental assumption underpinning the low-connectedness pathway to sustainability, i.e., that nature serves self-interest, is typically unwarranted due to the potential substitution of nature's functions by technology. Hence, the sole reliable approach to achieving sustainability lies in fostering inclusion, wherein individuals recognize their intrinsic connection to nature. [P. Welsey Schultz, (2002)]

The Sustainable Development Goals Psychological Inventory (SDGPI), which takes into account psychological factors including interest, motivation, and self-efficacy, is a valid instrument for research on sustainability and sustainable development, according to a study by A Di Fabio and MA Rosen (2020). It can help in the realization of the goals and can be used in various contexts, including national and international, with different targets and age levels. The SDGPI can also have practical policy implications, as it can help policymakers promote sustainable development and implement psychological-based interventions. The inventory may be used to provide customized communication and treatments for diverse ages, cultures, and situations, improve awareness, and compare outcomes at various levels. The results may also support organizational actions and public policies to advance the SDGs.

A new method of examining human behavior and experience is positive psychology (PP), which aims to balance the positive and negative elements of sustainable behavior in a research by V Corral Verdugo (2012). It focuses on researching human qualities and characteristics that support pro-environmental and pro-social acts, as well as the beneficial psychological effects of these actions. With an emphasis on the pursuit of human wellbeing, PP and the psychology of sustainability have the same objectives of enhancing people's quality of life and that of their surroundings. PP and the psychology of sustainability, however, do not support focusing just on the positive influences on behavior and experience. Rather, they should investigate negative affect, behavioral impediments, and the impact of favorable behavioral outcomes on detrimental environmental behaviors. Through the recovery of the good elements found in explanatory theories of sustainable conduct, we may add to our understanding of the bad aspects of behavior with regard to the environment.

Because sustainability has beneficial effects on the environment, society, economy, and institutions, it is essential to achieving both individual and community welfare. Good psychological outcomes reward sustainable conduct, which is dictated by favorable situational and dispositional antecedents. According to this concept, favorable outcomes also influence people's pro-sustainable orientation and the creation and upkeep of a favorable environment, which encourages individuals to take up new sustainable activities. Positive psychology could have an impact on other social sciences that address sustainability issues, like education, which ought to emphasize encouraging social virtues, optimism, creativity, self-efficacy, civic pride, responsibility, and pro-social role-playing. The legal discipline would benefit from a change from a negative conception and practice to a positive one. This would encourage pro-social and pro-ecological practices, as well as the material and social rewards that follow pro-social and sustainable behaviors in addition to the punitive consequences that follow criminal and antisocial behavior.

Social Marketing (SM) is a positive psychological approach that aims to change community behavior to reduce environmental impact. McKenzie-Mohr (2000) uses strategies to foster sustainable practices like energy conservation, environmental regulation, and solid waste control. The positive psychology of sustainability has potential to influence social disciplines dealing with environmental issues. However, the study of positive psychological factors on sustainable behavior is still in its early stages. The positive psychology of sustainability outlines potential for research and application, focusing on human strengths, virtues, psychological well-being, restoration experiences, intrinsic motivation, and positive human capacities. Addressing the positive dimensions of acting in favor of the sociophysical environment can yield significant benefits.

Objectives

- To research about the relationship between sustainable development and psychology.
- To study the implications of psychological inclusions in the subject of sustainability and their overall effect on sustainable development.
- To analyse existing literature for a detailed and better understanding of the topic.
- To draw effective conclusions regarding the subject of ecopsychology and its functionality in present scenario and for future utilization.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study is a theoretical analysis of literature based on psychology and sustainability, describing their relationship along with suggestions regarding psychology being a crucial and creative factor which can aid substantially to the cause of sustainable development.

This study has employed a descriptive research design, which is concerned with characterizing the attributes of a specific person, subject, or group.

Secondary Research

- **Secondary Data:** This type of data is gathered from pre-existing pieces of knowledge. It is data gathered from publications such as journals, newspapers, and the internet. This covers everything that has already been printed, from which we are extracting data.
- **Sources of Data Collection:** Research papers available on google scholar, online articles, journals, published interviews, etc.

Secondary research has been exhibited in all the chapters using secondary sources like internet and research papers. The information gathered from the sources listed above has been suitably organized and applied to the study project in the right contexts. Quotes, citations, images, and other data are included in the material obtained.

Discussions

In this segment, various different theories will be discussed regarding psychology and sustainable development.

If psychological research is closely aligned with other environmental sciences, the incentive structure for this work is strengthened, and greater emphasis is placed on the collective aspects of human behavior, psychologists can contribute to the analysis and mitigation of the three main sustainability issues: population growth, resource-intensive consumption, and harmful technologies.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) established three recognized dimensions—environmental, social, and economic—that may be used to assess sustainability (of nations, cities, and households).

One important contrast to note here is between an applied, "service-driven," constructive approach to environmental (social and economic) sustainability challenges and a pure, "value-free," positivistic approach, which is similar to Drenth's (1996) separation between the truthfulness and usefulness of psychology. From a positivistic standpoint, a "truthful" psychology of sustainable development demands a larger-than-usual scope for theory and research to describe, interpret, and predict environmental quality as a function of human behavior and as a prerequisite for a high standard of living. From a prescriptive or constructive stance, a "useful" psychology of sustainable development includes lifestyle goals, social situations, and behavior modification strategies aimed at enhancing environmental quality as a prerequisite for human welfare.

Why Do People Disregard Environmental Issues?

The psychological mystery is why and how most people seem to accept the looming long-term environmental catastrophe scenarios that so many environmental scientists so convincingly paint. Shortsightedness, commercial interests, technological optimism, nature-exploitative attitudes, and the perception that society is powerless to address environmental sustainability issues are all potential factors.

So how can an environmental risk or expense be collectively and legitimately evaluated, communicated, and managed? A possible solution was put forth by Steg and Vlek (2003; see also Vlek, 1996), who used a step-by-step methodology that involved the four components of the problem diagnosis, policy decision-making, practical intervention, and effectiveness evaluation. Each of these components was described in detail, including (ai) problem awareness assessment, (bj) behavior goal setting, (ck) policy instrument selection, and (dl) evaluation of effects and side effects for the target audience.

Psychologists may focus their attention on the following four distinct but connected types of activities:

- First and foremost, psychologists might want to get knowledgeable about certain environmental issues, such as family-planning, agriculture, and military defense operations, to make meaningful contributions and be taken seriously in their problem-oriented conclusions. This non-psychological "homework" adds an additional burden on professional activity.
- Secondly, psychologists can view environmental issues as socio-behavioral problems, like urban air pollution. Individuals' motivations may be based on immediate needs and social norms, rather than collective environmental issues. The challenge is to demonstrate that these problems are human-constructed and can be addressed through effective behavior-change programs.

- Thirdly, experts may evaluate and refine conceptual models and theories about environmental issues via empirical research. These studies can explain household energy use, personal views, and future quality of life if fossil-energy consumption is discouraged. They can also explain motorized transport intensification, environmental problems, and sustainable transport policies. Therefore, more work has to be done to combine environmental scientific, economic, and psychological perspectives.
- Lastly, psychologists can aid policymakers in developing sustainable behavior patterns, lifestyles, and business cultures. They can clarify sustainability goals, feasible behavior options, and bring about necessary changes through psychological theory, methodology, and creativity. Action research, involving interdisciplinary teams, is needed for meaningful answers.
- The behaviorism-cognitivism dimension distinguishes between reasoned and automatic behavior, deliberation and habit, and private and public behavior. Four distinct behavioral processes are produced by combining these dimensions: imitation, social comparison, repetition (habit), and deliberation. Deliberation involves individual reasoning about behavior options, while repetition is an automatic behavior resulting from positive reinforcements. Social comparison involves tuning behavior to observed or supposed norms, and imitation is a social process of automatically copying others' behavior.

Psychology and the Driving Forces of Environmental Decline

- **Population Psychology**

With 77 million new people added each year, there are currently over 6 billion people on the planet. Improved sanitation and health care are the primary drivers of this rapid development, but other factors, like as slower economic growth and a lack of access to reproductive health care in developing nations, are also contributing to it. Experts predict that increases in people's standards of living will be followed by a slowdown in population growth. In a 2002 project, Bandura used social cognitive theory concepts to broadcast serial dramatizations in areas of rapid population expansion to slow down population growth. The beneficial elements of living in tiny families were contrasted with the bad characteristics of large families in these dramatizations. A desire for smaller families, the use of contraceptive technologies, and a notable decline in birthrates were all repeatedly seen in meticulous assessment studies. In addition to bringing up moral concerns, the research sought to improve women's standing by guaranteeing equal access to social opportunities, education, and a say in family matters.

- **Consumer Psychology**

Understanding and facilitating the satisfaction of customers' needs and desires is the main goal of consumer psychology, which operates under the premise that "sovereign consumer" choices should be effectively met. This is a foolish attitude, though, as there are ways to increase people's needs, expand their possibilities, and improve their ability to spend. The promotion of sustainable consumption, which is characterized by the "three (or four) Rs: reduce, repair, reuse, and recycle," may be achieved via making adjustments to people's skills, changing the demands and values of consumers, and changing the supply of products and services. The gradual shift of satisfying fundamental necessities into giving in to new temptations has led to the development of unsustainable consumerism. Psychological research demonstrates that social and environmental elements are important quality-of-life determinants, which supports the shift to more "sufficient" consumption. The pursuit of material prosperity too much can backfire, and consumer ideals that are too focused on oneself can be harmful to one's own wellbeing.

- **Technology Psychology**

Psychologists play a crucial role in promoting sustainable development by analyzing product-behavior and technology-behavior interactions. Technological advancements have led to widespread mechanization and motorization of human activities, resulting in an overwhelming use of raw materials and fossil fuels. It is crucial to create sustainable consumer habits through the intelligent design, manufacture, marketing, usage, and disposal of tangible goods and technological equipment. However, psychologists often lack insight into the behavioral responses elicited by new products and technology. To contribute to sustainable development, psychologists must analyze product-behavior and technology-behavior interactions. For instance, one initiative sought to replace the energy source of a German community with biomass, a renewable and ecologically favorable resource. Psychologists initiated a longitudinal research to track changes in psychological characteristics and interviewed initiators of related transformation processes.

Seven Themes of Environmental Psychology

Environmental psychology has evolved from apolitical studies to a sustainability-oriented approach, emphasizing the importance of lay assessments in policy making. Environmental psychologists, such as those in this special issue, have been increasingly involved in decision-making processes since the 1960s. They emphasize the objective aspects of noise and the role of non-acoustical factors, such as noise maps and annoyance curves. This approach has been instrumental in battling against noise pollution and the destruction of traditional urban sounds. Environmental psychologists are essential in knowing what kinds of coercive tactics, when given properly and applied on a timetable that makes sense, voting drivers could accept in the context of traffic control. Good study is needed to understand the typical driving voter, and environmental psychologists are interested in modeling much like scientists from other fields. This problem emphasizes the need of increasing financing into environmental psychology in order to comprehend public engagement and enable it in particular contexts.

Rather than undertaking research to influence policy, some environmental psychologists are concentrating on the impacts of policy efforts. Jager and Mosler use active modeling to understand policy outcomes and train policymakers, avoiding expensive mistakes in policy making. Other environmental psychologists propose comprehensive models as heuristic frameworks, stimulating research in field or experimental settings with actual individuals. Examples include Schwartz's norm-activation theory and Ajzen's planned behavior theory. One model combines technical, interpersonal, human, and geophysical aspects to impact decision-making linked to sustainability in an attempt to create a generic model of societal issues.

Environmental psychologists often grapple with the mixed feelings surrounding technology, with some viewing it with suspicion and others optimistically believing it can help achieve sustainability goals. Technology has been dubbed "the new social disease" and has been associated with noise, pollution, and global warming. But millions of people's lives have also been better off as a result of it, especially when it comes to energy. Technology has not vanished despite these drawbacks; throughout decades and even centuries, it has helped millions of people live better lives. Environmental psychologists must deal with technology because it is unlikely to disappear, and policies aimed at facilitating citizen adoption of salutary technology must be encouraged. Research by environmental psychologists is crucial in understanding why and when technology is accepted by citizens.

Since the 1950s, pioneers in environmental psychology have worked with scholars in other fields, including geography and architecture. Today, fruitful collaborations in sustainability research are being done, with some new bridges. This trend is influenced by policies at national and international grant agencies that require interdisciplinary collaboration. Effective partnerships may strengthen the legitimacy of policy recommendations and have an impact on policy by examining an issue from a variety of insightful angles.

Environmental psychology has broadened its scope from focusing on individuals and small groups to considering sustainability at larger levels of analysis. For example, Van den Berg, Hartig, and Staats argue for policies incorporating nature into cities to balance rapid urbanization with mental and physical health benefits. They challenge urban planners and governments to increase greenery, improve transportation efficiency, and provide affordable housing. Other studies investigate the psychological aspects of global warming and water shortages. Bonnes et al. emphasize the importance of considering criteria before assessments, as different opinions can lead to unsustainable policy decisions. Environmental psychologists can help educate the public, gather policy-supporting information, and serve as mediators between the public and experts.

Environmental psychology is expanding by incorporating theoretical perspectives from other disciplines, such as goal-framing theory and behavioral decision theory. Lindenberg and Steg emphasize the importance of understanding individual citizens' motivations and goals for sustainability science. Gattig and Hendrickx emphasize the relevance of discounting outcomes with increased distance, bringing behavioral choice theory and economics into the mix. However, because the public tends to value environmental consequences less than in other areas, using economic ideas in the same manner as conventional economists might result in ineffectual policy. Sustainability initially focused on resources, but some environmental psychologists are now accepting the expanded concept highlighted in the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987). The WCED definition includes resource costs and conservation, making it a utopian vision. The special issue expands the sustainability construct to include quality of life, as highlighted by Van den Berg et al., Miedema, and Bonnes et al.

Environmental psychologists are proposing to expand the focus on sustainability to nonhuman biological issues like biodiversity and endangered species, as well as larger ecological problems like global warming and water crises. They are establishing a subdiscipline, conservation psychology, to address urgent problems, including research and theory on the nonhuman world.

The field of environmental psychology has developed and grown, concentrating on sustainability issues and becoming more involved with policymakers. There are now green politicians in many nations, and environmental psychologists may operate as a vital intermediary between citizens and legislators, assisting in the assessment of proposed structural changes' acceptability as well as their effects on behavior, stress, and overall quality of life. This established area is prepared to provide research that "makes a difference" in the actual world. It is a sign of the rising leadership of theorists and researchers in these nations that sustainability research is becoming more and more influential outside of North America, especially in western Europe. With contributions from the Middle and well East, South America, and Eastern Europe, the global awakening has expanded well beyond Western Europe. Nonetheless, obstacles still need to be overcome for the sector to have the intended impact on the actual world.

The Positive Psychology of Sustainable Behavior

Positive psychology and the psychology of sustainability share common goals and postulates, such as improving quality of life and environmental quality. Both fields emphasize the development of human capacities and the search for happiness. The concepts of pro-sustainability orientation, frugality, altruism, and equity are closely related to sustainable behaviors. The psychology of sustainability focuses on the influence of future tendency on environmentally protective actions, while positive psychology emphasizes civic virtues and institutions that help people become better citizens. Future orientation is also a crucial component of both psychological schemes, with optimism, hope, and faith being key components. Deliberation, perseverance, and purpose in life are also positive constructs in both fields. Both fields share common postulates, such as the pursuit of happiness, harmonious relationships, and the development of human capacities. By examining these concepts, it is possible to establish compatibilities between the two fields. Positive psychology (PP) and the psychology of sustainability share common interests and fields. PP focuses on positive ecological attitudes, which are closely related to the pro-ecological beliefs concept. Adherence to environmental norms is crucial for sustainable behaviors, and the concept of civic virtues suggests the development of behavioral tendencies for community success. Environmental positive emotions, such as emotional affinity towards nature and socio-biodiversity, play a significant role in environmental protection. Positive emotions that are linked to sustainable behaviors, like as empathy, love for children, and aesthetic sensibility, are also studied by PP. The ability to react to environmental conservation needs is a necessary component of pro-environmental competence, and pleasure arises naturally when an individual's expectations are met. A major theme in positive psychology is happiness, and research on happiness and actions that promote environmental conservation has lately been included into conservation psychology. Psychological restoration, which deals with attention and the replenishment of psychological resources depleted by stress and mental exhaustion, is another area of overlap between conservation psychology and positive psychology. Ultimately, plenitude, individual progress, subjective well-being, and personal actualization are all considered aspects of psychological well-being.

Implications

To sum up, this study highlights the importance of not only physical efforts but also mental dedication and motivation towards obtaining sustainable development. People need to be motivated psychologically for taking action at an individual level for the wellbeing of nature as well as our future generations. Psychologists need to take matters in their hands as well and conduct proper studies and surveys so as to resonate with the public on a personal level. Theories discussed in this research paper can act as a very crucial aid towards analysing human behaviour and tendencies towards a sustainable environment and what they really feel about working for it. Proper analysis, campaigns, awareness drives and events can fuel our sustainable development to a great extent. Ecopsychology needs to be taken seriously and should also be introduced in psychology curriculums to cultivate future youth in the field.

There are many more theories in the literature related to ecopsychology which can be referred while conducting public projects for the same. Work needs to be done to provide a sense of accomplishment to people when they participate in such activities so as to promote more sustainable behaviour among the public. Values need to be inculcated among the masses so that sustainability becomes a natural instinct to humans as it should.

As of now, the studies regarding ecopsychology are limited and there is scope for tremendous development. Professionals need to seize this opportunity so that our vision of sustainable development can reach new heights.

In the long run, if the subject of ecopsychology works well and professionals utilize it to its full potential, it might also be introduced as a separate field and it will surely be a great profession entirely dedicated towards sustainability and welfare of the nature.

Limitations

Since ecopsychology is still a relatively new field, there was only a limited amount of data available for this study. Furthermore, there has been no data analysis in this research; it is all theoretical. Time constraints were one of the main issues this study's conduct presented. Since no survey was undertaken, there were no participants in the study to offer their perspectives.

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