

An Assessment of Environmental Awareness among the Residents of Tehsil Mendhar, District Poonch J&K, 185211, India

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Abstract

Anything that surround and affects an organism from outside is known as environment. Environment is essential for all the living organism. Living organisms and environment have an interactive relationship with one another, as both are affected by their individual actions. Maximum of India live in villages, which are the store houses of natural resources and pillar of developments, but due to lack of awareness and non serious attitude of people toward environment, environment and its resources are degrading at an alarming rate. Environmental awareness and knowledge is very important for maintaining a harmonious relationship between man and environment. Present study is carried in Tehsil Mendhar of District Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir, India to assess the level and status of environmental awareness and knowledge among the general masses.

Keywords:-Environment, village, knowledge, awareness.

Introduction

Environment is the physical and biotic habitat that surrounds us. Environment consists of both biotic and abiotic components. The biotic components refers to the living organisms and the relationship among them, whereas abiotic or non living components refers to climate and other mediums. The living organisms in any ecosystem are affected by the physical environment. The environment for any living organism has never been constant, it always remain in a state of change. Every living species of plant, animal, or microbe influence its environment and in turn get influenced by it. From the very beginning of mankind, environment is not much modified by the intervention of man there was a natural check and balance. However after the scientific and industrial revolution in the recent past, there has been an immense impact of human being on the environment. Huge industrial installation, introduction of modern transport system, urbanization, population explosion and overexploitation of natural resources has resulted and contributed to large scale environmental pollution. Pollution and over exploitation of natural resources has affected a large to environment in the shape of global warming, acid rain, biodiversity loss, climate change, deforestation, food and water scarcity etc. Due to shortage of resources and destable economic conditions people in villages depends on local available resources for meeting their demand thereby degrading the environment without knowing about the consequences of their action. In order to protect and improve the local environment in the villages and small town's environmental awareness and knowledge is must to understand about local available resources.

Environmental awareness among the rural masses can be brought through environmental education as it is important to encourage, aware and assist the societies in conserving the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources must be equitable and ecologically friendly. Environmental education enables individuals to gain awareness about their environment as they acquire and exchange the knowledge, values, skills, experiences and determination which will enable them to act, individually and collectively both to solve various environmental problems at their local levels. Environmental education and awareness in villages includes a broader approach which should over come the common perception of education and information in schools, colleges etc. Environmental awareness must ensure participation and learning for people of all ages. In order to aware general masses in villages about environment, it is important to understand first that what people know, think and believe about environment. Environment awareness requires special focus with reference to the areas, communities, cultures etc. In order to create environmental awareness among the common masses in villages, various awareness methods must be used such as community meetings, cultural activities, street plays, puppetry, and interactions at religious congregations. Media, both electronic and print in local languages plays an important role in creating environmental awareness. Protection of environment and its resources is not the sole responsibility of one section, one religion or one group it is the responsibility of the whole society/nation. Environmental awareness and education is must at gross root level in villages in order to fulfil the concept of think globally and act locally.

Objective

The objective of the present study is to assess that what general public think about environment, its importance, available resources, and whether people are aware of environmental degradation/ pollution or not.

Material and methods

Study area

The present study is carried in Tehsil Mendhar of district Poonch J&K India. Geographically Mendhar lies in the foothills of western Himalayas in Pir Panjal range and located 33° 37' 0" N Latitude and 74° 8' 0" E Longitude at an altitude of 977m. Climate varies from subtropical to temperate. Mendhar is one of the rural Tehsil of District, Poonch with an area of 168.68 km² and comprised of 24 villages namely bhatidhar, narol, Chhungan, Chackbanola, Chattral, Kalaban, Pathanateer, Gursai, Sarhuti, Salwah, Banola, jugal, Maidan, Thera, Dabsi, Dharana, Bhera, Ari, Harni, Prat, Galutha, Kotain, Gohlad and Lanjote.

Method

For the collection of data, 480 respondents were selected from 24 villages, 20 respondents were chosen randomly from each village (10 males and 10 females) in the age limit of 18 to 40. For surveying and primary data collection, a questionnaire was prepared with different variables pertaining to environmental aspects such as Educational qualification, wastage dumping, seasonal/general plantation, environmental education and awareness, importance of natural resources, fuel consumption etc. and respondents were asked about. Moreover for general observations and assessing environmental knowledge of residents, discussions and interviews were also held. For the analysis and interpretation of data simple percentage method and SPSS software is used.

Result and discussion.

During Survey data was collected using questionnaire on different environmental variable. The results of the responses are calculated in the form of percentage and are shown in the tables. Data generated after calculation of various variables reveals that of the total 480 respondents it is observed that 62.8% of respondents were literate and 37.92% were illiterate, in case of males 76.25 were literate and 23.75% were illiterate, where in case of females 47.92% were literate and 52.8 % were illiterate. 80.62% of residents use toilet and only 19.38 % were found to defecate in open. According to people due to Panchayat raj and NREGA scheme the Govt. has provided financial assistance to built individual toilets. The percentage of male and female respondents is almost equal. (Table 1). As far as seasonal/general plantation and resource protective measures at local levels are concerned, only 23.33% of residents took part in some plantation drives at local levels and 23.12% know about some protective measures to protective the natural resources, 31.75% of male and 15.42% of female took part in a plantation drives and 40.42% of males and 5.83% of female had knowledge about natural resource protective measures.

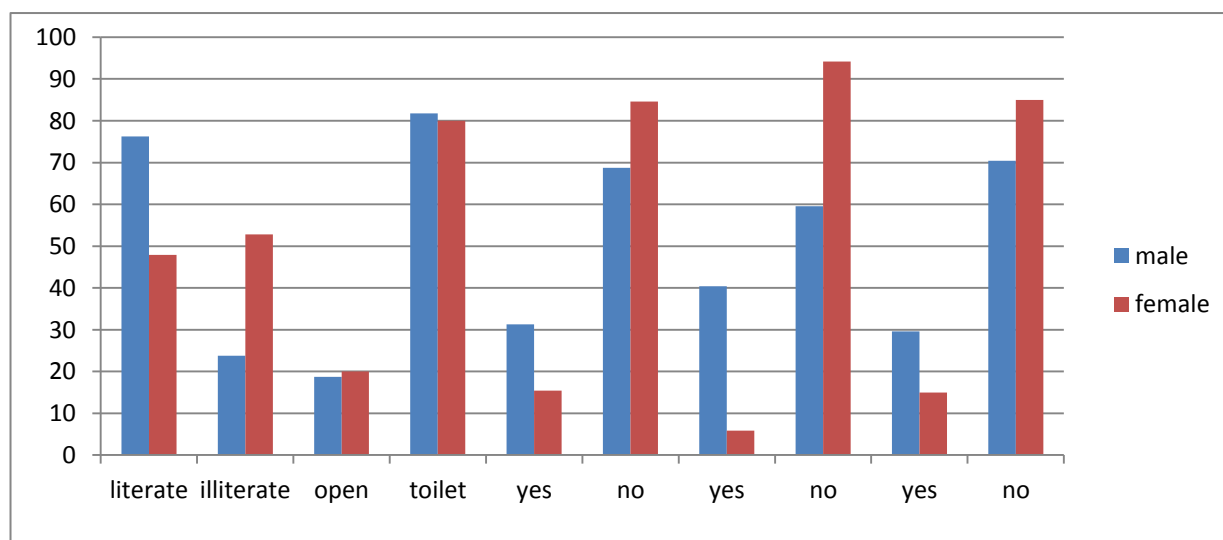
The less knowledge of female population about resource protective measure and plantation is due to the patriarchal nature of villages and female are supposed to look after the household only as stated by maximum of respondents. Only 22.90% of respondents were aware about various diseases and health problems which arise due to environmental pollution and degradation, male 29.58% and female 15.0 %.(Figure 1).

Table 1: Surveyed table about educational qualification, defecation, Seasonal plantation, resources protective measures, health problems due to environmental degradation.

S.No.	Educational Qualification, Defecation, Seasonal Plantation, Resources Protective Measures, Health Problems due to Environmental Degradation				
	Variables		Gender		Total Surveyed Samples (480)
			Male (240)	Female (240)	
1	Educational Qualification	Literate	183 (76.25)	115 (47.92)	298 (62.8)
		Illiterate	57 (23.75)	125 (52.8)	182 (37.92)
2	Defecation	Open	45 (18.75)	48 (20.0)	93 (19.38)
		Toilet	195 (81.25)	192 (80.0)	387 (80.62)
3	Seasonal Plantation	Yes	75 (31.25)	37 (15.42)	112 (23.33)
		No	165 (68.75)	203 (84.58)	368 (76.67)
4	Resources Protective Measures	Yes	97 (40.42)	14 (5.83)	111 (23.12)
		No	143 (59.58)	226 (94.17)	369 (76.88)
5	Health Problems due to Environmental Degradation	Yes	71 (29.58)	36 (15.0)	107 (22.29)
		No	169 (70.42)	204 (85.0)	373 (77.71)

Source: Computed.

Figures in Parentheses are Percentages to Total

**Figure:-1 Educational qualification, Defecation, Seasonal plantation, Resources protective measures, Health problems due to environmental degradation.**

Data regarding environmental education and awareness, importance of resources and awareness about pollution has shows that 43.75% of people are aware of environmental awareness and knowledge as they have some idea about environment. Among male 43.33% and among female 44.67 % were aware of it. As far as importance of resources is concerned out of total, only 18.54% respondents have some knowledge of natural resources and their importance, within gender 22.5% of male and 14.58% of female. (Figure 2)

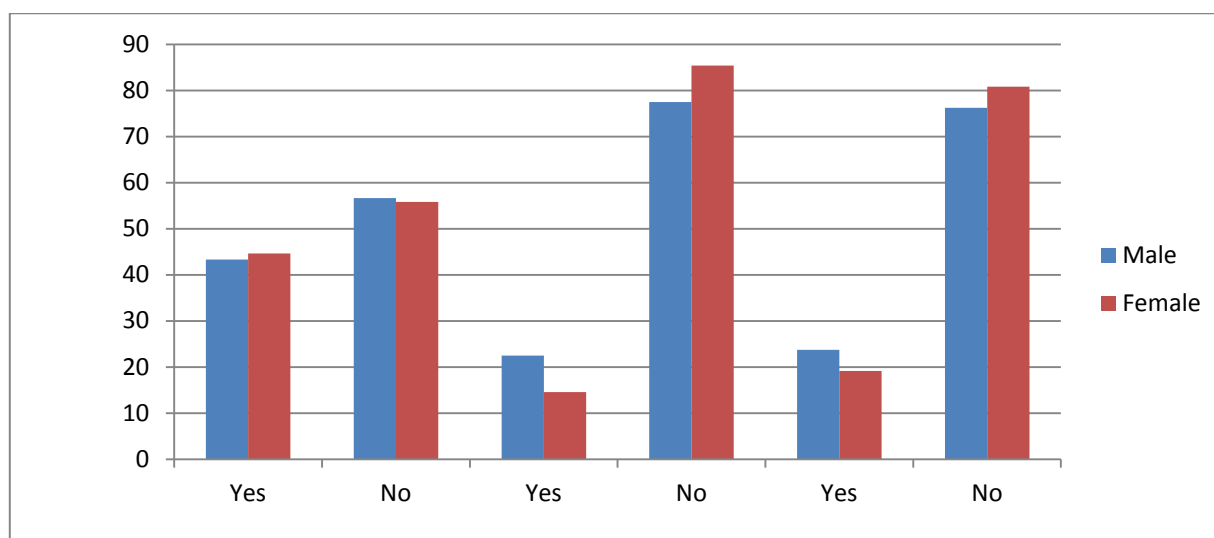


Figure 2:-Pertaining Environmental Education and Awareness, Importance of resources and Pollution.

Regarding pollution (air, water) only 21.46% of the total population were aware about pollution, and its effects on man, animals and environment, gender wise 23.75% of male and 19.17% of female (Table 2) the less knowledge of respondents about the importance of natural resources and pollution is due to available of vast natural resources in the area in the form of forest, water bodies, soil, grass lands, moreover according to respondent they don't think that, they are degrading resources or polluting the environment.

Table 2: Surveyed table pertaining environmental education and awareness, importance of natural resources and pollution.

S.No.	Environmental awareness, importance of resources and Pollution				Total Surveyed Samples (480)
	Variables		Gender		
			Male (240)	Female (240)	
1	Environmental Education and Awareness	Yes	104 (43.33)	106 (44.67)	210 (43.75)
		No	136 (56.67)	134 (55.83)	270 (56.25)
2	Importance of Natural Resources	Yes	54 (22.5)	35 (14.58)	89 (18.54)
		No	186 (77.5)	205 (85.42)	391 (81.46)
3	Awareness about Pollution	Yes	57 (23.75)	46 (19.17)	103 (21.46)
		No	183 (76.25)	194 (80.83)	377 (78.51)

Source: Computed.

Figures in Parentheses are Percentages to Total

On the basis of data collected it is found that 54.58% of population use wood as a fuel and 45.42% use LPG as fuel, More than 50% residents use wood because it is easily and freely available in the area, massive deforestation is done by villagers to fulfil their need of fire wood, moreover people are not even so aware that burning of wood cause air pollution (Table 3).

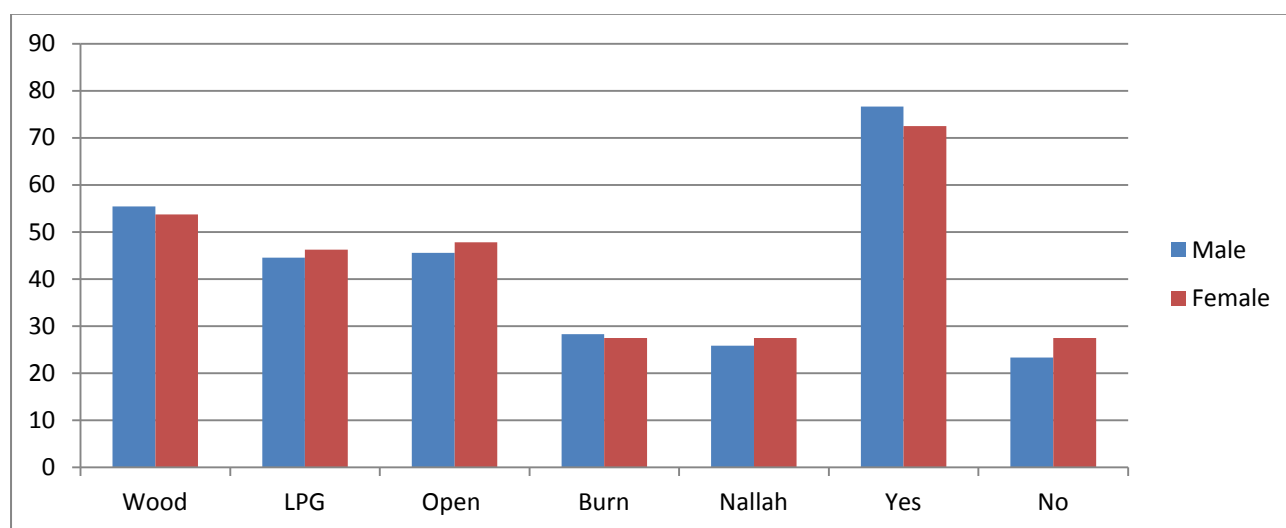
Table 3: Surveyed table pertaining Fuel Consumption, Wastage dumping and Usage of Fertilizers.

S.No.	Fuel Consumption, Wastage Dumping and Usage of Fertilizers				
	Variables		Gender		Total Surveyed Samples (480)
			Male (240)	Female (240)	
1	Fuel Consumption	Wood	133 (55.42)	129 (53.75)	262 (54.58)
		LPG	107 (44.58)	111 (46.25)	218 (45.42)
2	Wastage Dumping	Open	110 (45.83)	113 (47.8)	223 (46.46)
		Burn	68 (28.33)	66 (27.5)	134 (27.92)
		Nallah	62 (25.83)	61 (25.42)	123 (25.62)
3	Usage of Fertilizers	Yes	184 (76.67)	174 (72.5)	358 (74.58)
		No	56 (23.33)	66 (27.5)	122 (25.42)

Source: Computed.

Figures in Parentheses are Percentages to total

Regarding wastage dumping respondents had different view as 46.46 % of residents throw it in open, 27.92% burn it and 25.62% throw it in nallahs /local water bodies. During discussion it is found that people don't consider wastage as pollution or source of pollution due to lack of awareness, despite 62.8% of them are literate. As far usage of fertilizer and pesticides is concerned 74.58% of people are aware of the use and effects of artificial fertilizer and pesticides on environment. Sex wise 76.67% of male and 72.5% of females were aware of the effects of fertilizer and pesticide on environment (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:- Pertaining Fuel Consumption, Wastage dumping and Usage of Fertilizers**

Conclusion

On the basis of data it is evident that environmental awareness among the people of Tehsil Mendhar is not as much, despite 62.8% of respondents are literate, as people don't have much knowledge and awareness about wastage dumping, plantation, resource protective measures, various environmental related diseases, environmental pollution particularly air and water pollution and importance of resource. There is a dire need of environmental awareness among the people in Tehsil Mendhar; moreover people are not much interested in improving the environment and its resources due to their non serious and irresponsible attitude toward environment. There must be some sort of environmental awareness in the form of street plays, community meetings, Cultural activities on local available resources, which inculcate interest and moral obligation among the villagers toward environment and its resources. In addition to this media both electronic and print can act as a powerful and important tool for creating environmental awareness at local level.

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