

ENVIRONMENT IS THE KEY OF WELLBEING: DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The environment is the fundamental source of all possible existence on planet Earth. However, over the recent years, the environment has been exploited excessively because of which the environmental conditions are becoming worse day by day. Pollution of air, water and land, mining, industrialisation, modern urbanization, deforestation, release of chemical effluents and landfills are some of the major factors that cause the gradual deterioration of the environment. It is necessary to conserve the environment in order to protect wildlife and to preserve the different species. With the disastrous pace of climate change, a result of pollution and exploitation of the environment, finding out ways to protect the environment from any further damage should be the first priority. Bringing back the environment to its original state is critically important and is the only solution. Natural environments, such as parks, forests, and green spaces, have been found to reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall psychological well-being. Being in nature or having access to natural surroundings can promote relaxation, restoration, and a sense of calmness.

Keywords: Environment, wellbeing, Nature etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Investing in environmental sustainability can serve as an insurance policy for health and human well-being. The term ‘well-being’ is a construct more typically associated with human-beings than environments. With reference to the environmental sciences, the word ‘integrity’, in the context of ecological or biological integrity, is more frequently used to suggest wholeness or integration of ecosystem structure and function. Ecological communities that have such integrity would support the full range of species and ecosystem processes expected of a natural habitat in that region and be able to recover from normal stresses. Clearly this notion of ecological integrity would be a central and necessary element of environmental well-being.

Working towards a common goal will be the easiest and fastest way to keep the environment from any more harm. According to Ban Ki-moon, “Saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, advancing economic growth... These are one and the same fight. We must connect the dots between climate change, water scarcity, energy shortages, global health, food security and women’s empowerment. Solutions to one problem must be solutions for all”. This is what we have to act on and look forward to – finding the dots, connecting them and providing solutions. The leaders of the world are working to reduce the rapid degradation of the environment, and there are organizations like the United Nations who come up with initiatives to create awareness and get people to take actions to curb the problems of the environment. Some of these initiatives include the 2019 Sustainable Development Summit, 2019 Climate Action Summit, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Paris Agreement and many other programs that include river conservation, afforestation, coastal management, wetland conservation and so on. While all these measures are in action, individuals are also obliged to take steps to preserve the environment that everyone is a part of. With everyone’s efforts, we can be sure that all of it will definitely make a difference and help the environment in becoming healthy and sustainable.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect the common understanding that a healthy environment is integral to the full enjoyment of basic human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation, and quality of life.

Directly tackling the inter-linkages between environment and human health presents new and interwoven opportunities to meet the SDGs in a more cost-effective and beneficial manner. To “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” (SDG3) – which includes a specific target related to air quality – cannot be achieved over the long term without explicit action on terrestrial ecosystems (SDG15), oceans (SDG14), cities (SDG11), water and sanitation (SDG6).

Air pollution is the world’s largest single environmental risk to health (some 7 million people across the world die each year due to everyday exposure to poor air quality), but it cannot be viewed in isolation.

Fresh air, clean water, shelter, and a stable climate are just a few requirements for human health that link directly to the environment. Environmental public health urges us to understand the connection between the environment’s health and our own.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IS COSTLY AND EXPENSIVE

Environmental degradation is estimated to cause 174-234 times as many premature deaths as occur in conflicts annually. Disproportionate impacts of environmental harms are evident on specific groups: the poor, the young, the elderly, women and migrant workers, the report says. Zika, Ebola, MERS, SARS, Marburg... new zoonotic diseases (spread from animals to humans) are currently emerging every four months, with the main drivers being exponential population growth, intensive livestock breeding, (there are 36 billion domestic animals on the planet) and concomitant disturbed environments and biodiversity loss. Strengthening healthy ecosystems is key to preventing or slowing the emergence of these costly diseases. A key need is for greater investment in integrated surveillance of wildlife, livestock and human health. The financial costs of environmentally related health risks are generally in the range of 5-10 per cent of GDP, with air pollution taking the highest toll. Evidence exists, however, of the catalytic and multiple benefits of investing in environmental quality in terms of development, poverty reduction, resource security, reduced inequalities and reduced risks to human health and well-being.

3. MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Regarding mental health benefits, nature has a very wide definition. It can mean green spaces like parks, woodland or forests and blue spaces like rivers, wetlands, beaches or canals. It also includes trees on an urban street, private gardens, verges and even indoor plants or window boxes. Surprisingly, even watching nature documentaries is good for our mental health. This is great news as it means the mental health benefits of nature can be made available to nearly every one of us, no matter where we live. There is growing evidence to suggest that exposure to natural environments can be associated with mental health benefits. Clean air and water, sanitation and green spaces, safe workplaces can enhance people's quality of life: reduced mortality and morbidity, healthier lifestyles, improved productivity of workers and their families, improve lives of women, children and elderly and are crucial to mental health. Mental health issues rank among the 10 largest non-fatal threats in most countries, according to the report. There is growing evidence to suggest that exposure to natural environments can be associated with mental health benefits. Proximity to greenspace has been associated with lower levels of stress and reduced symptomology for depression and anxiety, while interacting with nature can improve cognition for children with attention deficits and individuals with depression. A 2014 epidemiological study has shown that people who move to greener urban areas benefit from sustained improvements in their mental health.

4. CONCLUSION

The Earth's environment makes Earth the only planet on the solar system where life and sustainability is possible. From the beginning of time, the Earth has provided all the inhabitants of the planet with everything they need for their survival. On the other hand, human beings have exploited all the natural resources for their own selfish needs and have rendered the planet like a barren and ramshackle land. Various facts based upon previous studies suggest that individuals often seek peace, silence and comfort in nature, especially during stressful times.

- Human beings are an integral part of the environment and hold a huge responsibility to upkeep the living conditions for their own sake and for the sake of all the inhabitants of the planet, including plants and animals. The balanced management of natural resources and the environment as a whole is crucial for the well-being of all living beings and for the economic growth of the entire world. Managing the use of resources (both renewable and non-renewable) effectively, can help solve the many disputes between countries, states and people for the power to claim at least a part of the resources as their own. It is high time people understand that the health of the environment is vital, and only if the environment is healthy will all living beings have a chance of survival.
- The environment is the basic life support system for all living things on planet Earth. It is a combination of natural and human-made components. Natural components include air, water, land and living organisms. Roads, industries, buildings, etc., are human-made components.

The natural environment can be differentiated into four main components – Biosphere, Lithosphere, Hydrosphere and Atmosphere. The topmost layer of the Earth is called the Lithosphere, which is a thin layer of soil made of rocks and minerals. The hydrosphere consists of various types of water bodies like seas, oceans, rivers, lakes, ponds, etc. Atmosphere, consisting of water vapor, gasses and dust particles, is the layer of air that surrounds the Earth. The living world consisting of human beings, plants and animals constitute the biosphere.

- The environment is dependent on the interaction between all the different components. However, human beings play a huge role in the making and breaking of the environment. Being the supreme most intellectual power on Earth, human beings influence the wellness of the environment to a great extent. The impact of the environment on all living beings is directly proportional to the way human beings treat the environment. Any kind of existence

would not be possible without air, water or land. Nothing to eat, not a drop to drink and nowhere to go is not what we or our future generations should expect to have. Every living thing depends largely on the environment for survival, and having a clean and safe environment is solely in the hands of the human beings

As humans, we are interconnected with our environment. Our natural and built environment is more than just a place for us to live. The state of our world affects our physical and mental health. This vital relationship between humans and our surroundings is called environmental health. Just as the food we eat impacts our mental and physical health, the state of the planet does, too. Environmental health looks at various aspects of our environment, including pollution, access to safe drinking water, and infrastructure issues that impact people's health. The metaphors of 'planet as patient' and 'healthy ecosystems' have played an important role in communicating both the tangible and intangible dimensions of environmental well-being to the non-scientific community. The successful "Healthy Waterways" project in South-East Queensland, Australia is an example of this. People have been able to relate to the project easily because health is a familiar concept. Despite engendering considerable debate within the scientific community metaphors such as healthy ecosystems have paved the way for transdisciplinary thinking about the many interfaces the biophysical environment shares with human society. Regardless of whether scientists support or oppose the use of metaphors such as ecosystem health, there is little contention that to protect both ecological integrity and human society, the needs of both and their interdependence have to be understood.

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