



ISSN (E): 2277-7695
ISSN (P): 2349-8242
NAAS Rating: 5.23
TPI 2023; SP-12(12): 1130-1132
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www.thepharmajournal.com
Received: 10-09-2023
Accepted: 15-10-2023

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Analysis of undergraduate awareness about environmental protection and wildlife conservation laws in India

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Abstract

India has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to environmental preservation and the sustainable management of resources over its extensive history. This commitment is deeply entrenched within India's constitutional framework and its international obligations, emphasizing the imperative need for environmental protection, conservation, and responsible resource utilization. Every Indian citizen is entrusted with the duty to safeguard and enhance the natural environment, encompassing forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife, and fostering empathy for all living beings. The aim of this study is to assess the current knowledge and practices among undergraduate students. The findings revealed that a staggering 95.45 percent of respondents lacked awareness of laws pertaining to environmental protection, while a mere 27.28 percent demonstrated familiarity with legislation concerning wildlife protection and the conservation of endangered species. The study recommends the integration of environmental laws into the undergraduate curriculum, enhanced enforcement of these regulations, revision of pollution prevention policies, adoption of comprehensive pollution control strategies, development of effective policies for prosecution and enforcement, alignment of environmental laws with international obligations, and the promotion of collaborative approaches to their enforcement.

Keywords: Environmental laws, wildlife, sustainable development

Introduction

Throughout ancient India, a fundamental requirement to honor and protect nature was the adherence to dharma, evidenced in various historical texts. The country's approach to environmental protection, traced back to antiquity, has undergone a transformation from religious mandates to today's constitutional and legal framework, evolving through different legal systems, including common law and secular practices. Presently, the constitution of India stands as the ultimate authority in all executive, legislative, and judicial matters within the nation. What initially began as a legal system shaped by colonial rule has now evolved into an integral element of the world's largest democracy, playing a crucial role in upholding constitutional rights for all citizens.

Today's primary global concern revolves around safeguarding, securing, and enhancing human environments. Contributing factors to environmental degradation encompass industrialization, urbanization, population expansion, excessive resource consumption, disruption of natural ecological balances, and the commercial exploitation leading to the extinction of various plant and animal species.

The enactment of the Environment (Protection) Act in 1986 was a response to ensuring environmental safety, enhancing environmental quality, and addressing pollution concerns. This legislation was significantly influenced by the tragic "Bhopal gas Tragedy." Subsequently, the National Environment Tribunal Act of 1995 introduced stringent legal liabilities for accidents involving hazardous materials.

The Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 was aimed at safeguarding untamed animals, birds, and plant life. It prohibits the hunting of species listed in the schedules and the removal or destruction of specific plant varieties from forest areas. Article 48(A) of the Indian constitution mandates the state's efforts to conserve and improve the environment and protect forests and wildlife. Additionally, Article 51(A) (g) assigns every Indian citizen the fundamental duty to preserve and enhance the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and various species, emphasizing compassion for all living beings.

The National Green Tribunal Act of 2010 (NGT) plays a significant role in handling civil cases related to seven environmental acts, including the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974; Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1974; Air

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(Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1977; Forest Conservation Act, 1980; Environmental Protection Act, 1986; Public Liability Insurance Act 1991; and Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

There are six schedules established for wildlife conservation, each delineating various levels of protection. The highest degree of protection is accorded to species listed under Schedule I and Part II of Schedule II, with stringent penalties for any violations. Species listed in Schedules III and IV also enjoy protection, but the repercussions for transgressions are comparatively less severe. However, our country faces challenges in implementing these protective measures effectively. Given the critical role played by the environment, fostering knowledge and awareness becomes profoundly significant. Hence, the present study endeavors to achieve the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the current level of understanding regarding laws and regulations concerning environmental protection.
2. To assess the effectiveness of an educational package developed to gauge the knowledge enhancement among the respondents.

Methodologies

A total of 90 respondents in all were chosen at random from the colleges in the Udaipur district of Rajasthan. They were

given a questionnaire online to assess the knowledge level of students regarding laws and legislations pertaining to Environmental protection and wildlife conservation of the effects of climate change and potential remedies. The collected data was appropriately analyzed to get the insightful conclusions.

Results and Discussion

The obtained data from the respondents forms the cornerstone of this paper, providing essential insights into their perspectives and awareness levels regarding environmental laws and wildlife conservation. A meticulous analysis of the data underscores several significant trends and patterns, shedding light on the participants' comprehension, awareness, and adherence to various legal frameworks governing environmental protection. The examination of this data reveals the prevailing gaps in knowledge and implementation of environmental regulations among the surveyed individuals. These findings serve as crucial indicators, emphasizing the need for enhanced educational interventions and increased awareness initiatives to bolster compliance with environmental laws and wildlife conservation statutes. Overall, the amassed information presents a comprehensive overview, highlighting areas necessitating further attention and emphasizing the importance of informed action towards sustainable environmental practices.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of demographic profile of the respondents

S. No.	Particulars		Frequency(f)	Percentage
1	Age	18-21	55	61.11
		22-25	35	38.88
2	Gender	Male	45	50.00
		Female	45	50.00
3	Qualification	Graduation	60	66.66
		Post-Graduation	30	33.33

The statistical breakdown presented in Table 1 reveals that respondents aged 18 to 21 constituted a majority at 55 individuals, accounting for approximately 54.54 percent of the total sample size. Meanwhile, respondents falling within the 22 to 25 age group comprised 35 individuals, representing about 45.45 percent of the surveyed population. In terms of gender distribution, the data depicts 45 female respondents,

constituting 13.6 percent of the total, and 86.4 percent comprising male respondents, totaling 45 individuals. Moreover, the educational classification indicates that 60 graduates participated; making up 59.09 percent of the sample, while 30 post-graduates constituted 40.90 percent of the total respondents.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of Knowledge, Awareness and Practice level of the respondents

S. No.	Topic	Don't know about it (%)	Know about it (%)
1	Knowledge about any act formulated on e-waste	77.27	22.73
2	Awareness about environmental laws and legislation	95.45	4.55
3	Awareness about different improvised laws and legislation	90.90	9.1
4	Practice any law of environment protection	50	50
5	Awareness about wildlife conservation laws	72.72	27.28

Table 2 provides an overview of the knowledge, awareness, and practices exhibited by the surveyed students. Notably, a staggering 77.27 percent of respondents exhibit a notable absence of familiarity with the specific statute governing e-waste management. Additionally, a substantial 95.45 percent display a lack of acquaintance with the diverse array of environmental laws and regulations. Strikingly, a considerable

90.90 percent manifest a dearth of awareness concerning recent legislative modifications and updated environmental laws. In terms of practical application, a modest 50 percent of respondents actively engage in adhering to environmental protection statutes, while a significant 72.72 percent lack awareness regarding laws dedicated to wildlife conservation.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondent viewpoints pertaining to varied environmental legislations.

S. No	Topic	In favour/ Agree (%)	Against/ do not agree (%)
1.	In favour of ban of single used plastic law	97.77	2.23
2.	Laws related to pollution are enough for now	50	50
3.	Government should advertise environmental rules and regulations	94.44	5.56
4.	Is government sole responsible for formulation of laws	81.81	18.81
5.	Is Government lacking in implementing the laws	95.45	5.55

The analysis derived from Table 3 showcases a strong consensus among respondents, with a significant 97.77 percent supporting the implementation of a ban on single-use plastic bags. However, it's notable that only half of the surveyed individuals, precisely 50 percent, are of the opinion that the current laws in place sufficiently cater to the country's environmental protection needs. Moreover, a noteworthy 81.81 percent of respondents express their belief in the necessity for government-backed promotion of environmental rules and regulations through robust advertising campaigns. It's also pertinent to note that 18.81 percent of opinions underscore the notion that the government holds exclusive responsibility for formulating laws in the realm of environmental protection. Most notably, an overwhelming 95.45 percent of participants assert that the government is lacking in effective implementation of these laws, signaling a notable area for improvement and heightened efficiency in execution.

Conclusion

This study highlights that despite the presence of numerous laws and regulations in India, only a minority of individuals are cognizant of them. It is undeniable that safeguarding our Earth necessitates proactive measures from us. Yet, the success of such efforts hinges on widespread education and awareness about environmental challenges across all sections of society, from parents and neighbors to strangers. Rather than solely emphasizing environmental awareness, environmental policy should prioritize regulating actions impacting the environment. The research recommends periodic evaluations by governments of enacted laws and the related institutional mechanisms at national, state, and local levels in the realm of environment and sustainable development. This evaluation aims to enhance their practical efficacy, possibly with the support of proficient international organizations. Additionally, the study proposes integrating environmental laws and regulations into students' curriculum to ensure both knowledge acquisition and practical application. Furthermore, government initiatives should concentrate on promoting awareness of environmental laws among the general public. Strategies involving the promotion of public awareness, dissemination of informative materials, and specialized training for officials responsible for implementing these laws could be part of these programs. Leveraging the potency of social media platforms can significantly aid in disseminating educational content to a wider audience. Engaging with and sharing posts might seem insignificant, but their impact can be surprisingly substantial.

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