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Research Paper

Eco-Friendly Behaviour among Indian Young Adults: The Role of Environmental Awareness and Demographic Differences

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ABSTRACT

Background: Environmental sustainability has emerged as one of the most pressing global concerns of the twenty-first century. Eco-friendly behaviour — encompassing recycling, energy conservation, sustainable purchasing, and waste management — plays a pivotal role in shaping ecological health. This study investigated eco-friendly behaviour and its correlates among young adults (aged 18–29 years) in India. **Aim:** The study aimed to examine the relationship between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour, determine whether environmental awareness significantly predicts eco-friendly behaviour, and explore the influence of demographic variables — gender, age, residential background, educational attainment, and occupational status — on eco-friendly behaviour. **Methods:** A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed. A total of 100 Indian young adults (51 males, 49 females; aged 18–29 years, M = 22.4, SD = 3.1) were recruited through convenience sampling via an online survey platform. The General Ecological Behaviour (GEB) Scale and the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) Scale were the primary measurement instruments. Data were analysed using Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA. **Results:** Environmental awareness was strongly and positively correlated with eco-friendly behaviour ($r = .819$, $p < .001$) and significantly predicted eco-friendly behaviour, accounting for 67.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .671$, $F(1, 98) = 199.70$, $p < .001$). Gender ($p < .05$), educational attainment ($p < .05$), and occupational status ($p < .01$) significantly influenced eco-friendly behaviour, while age and residential background did not yield significant differences. **Conclusion:** These findings highlight the importance of socio-educational factors in shaping pro-environmental behaviour and underscore the need for targeted, demographic-sensitive environmental interventions among young adults in India.

Keywords: *Eco-Friendly Behaviour, Young Adults, Environmental Awareness, Demographic Differences, GEB Scale, New Environmental Paradigm*

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented acceleration in environmental degradation, driven largely by human activity. Climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and the accumulation of plastic waste have placed ecological sustainability at the forefront of global discourse. The scientific consensus is unambiguous: without significant changes in individual and collective behaviour, environmental

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consequences will be far-reaching and irreversible (IPCC, 2022). In this context, understanding what motivates individuals to engage in eco-friendly behaviour has become one of the most pressing inquiries in environmental psychology.

Young adults, broadly defined as individuals aged 18 to 29 years, occupy a unique and influential position in the landscape of environmental action. They are the generation that will directly inherit the ecological consequences of current consumption and production patterns, and they are simultaneously the demographic most actively engaged in environmental discourse on digital and social platforms. However, environmental awareness does not always translate into sustained behavioural change — a gap that has attracted considerable scholarly attention (Bamberg & Möser, 2007). Understanding the psychological and socio-demographic factors that bridge this gap is essential for designing effective environmental interventions.

India, as a rapidly developing nation with a population exceeding 1.4 billion people, presents a particularly complex and urgent context for the study of eco-friendly behaviour. Urban expansion, rising middle-class consumption, and shifting lifestyle patterns have intensified environmental pressures, while rural communities grapple with distinct environmental vulnerabilities including water scarcity and agricultural disruption. The socio-cultural diversity of India further complicates understanding how demographic variables shape environmental attitudes and behaviours. Research specifically examining demographic differences in eco-friendly behaviour among Indian young adults remains limited, representing a significant gap in the existing literature.

Eco-friendly behaviour, also referred to as pro-environmental behaviour or ecological behaviour, encompasses conscious actions undertaken by individuals to minimise their negative impact on the natural environment (Kaiser, 1998). Such actions include recycling and waste segregation, conserving electricity and water, reducing plastic usage, adopting sustainable consumption habits, using public transport, and supporting environmentally responsible organisations. The General Ecological Behaviour (GEB) Scale, developed by Kaiser (1998), operationalises eco-friendly behaviour across multiple domains and provides a validated, widely used instrument for its measurement.

Environmental awareness refers to an individual's knowledge and understanding of environmental issues, including their causes, consequences, and available responses. The New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) Scale, originally developed by Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) and revised by Dunlap et al. (2000), measures the extent to which individuals subscribe to an ecological worldview recognising the limits of natural resources and the potential for ecological crisis. While environmental awareness is generally considered a necessary precondition for pro-environmental action, the attitude-behaviour gap — in which individuals who express pro-environmental views nonetheless fail to act accordingly — is a well-documented phenomenon (Steg & Vlek, 2009). Nevertheless, environmental awareness remains one of the strongest predictors of eco-friendly behaviour, particularly when accompanied by perceived self-efficacy and personal environmental norms.

Demographic variables are known to significantly influence environmental attitudes and behaviour. Gender differences have been consistently documented, with women generally demonstrating stronger pro-environmental orientations than men, attributed in part to socialisation patterns and gender role identity (Zelezny et al., 2000). Educational attainment

is associated with greater environmental knowledge, critical engagement with sustainability issues, and more frequent pro-environmental behaviour (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). Occupational status shapes behaviour through resource availability, workplace culture, and institutional norms. Residential background — particularly the urban-rural divide — affects access to sustainable infrastructure and exposure to environmental pressures. Age differences within the young adult range have been inconsistently reported in the literature, with most studies finding modest within-cohort variation.

Several theoretical frameworks inform the present study. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) posits that behavioural intentions are shaped by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Stern et al.'s (1999) Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory emphasises the causal chain from biospheric values to ecological beliefs to awareness of consequences to personal norms and ultimately behaviour. Ballew et al. (2020) highlighted identity-based motivation as a driver of eco-friendly behaviour, demonstrating that individuals who identify as environmentally conscious are significantly more likely to engage in sustainable practices. Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy further underlines the importance of individuals' belief in their capacity to make a meaningful environmental difference.

Despite growing global interest in environmental psychology, empirical research on eco-friendly behaviour in the Indian context remains comparatively sparse, and studies examining the simultaneous influence of multiple demographic variables are particularly limited. The present study addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive, empirical analysis of the relationship between environmental awareness, five demographic variables, and eco-friendly behaviour among Indian young adults.

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Levels of environmental awareness will be significantly and positively associated with levels of eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Environmental awareness will significantly and positively predict eco-friendly behaviour above and beyond chance, such that higher environmental awareness scores will yield higher predicted eco-friendly behaviour scores in a regression model.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Age will significantly influence eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Gender will significantly influence eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 5:** Residential background will significantly influence eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 6:** Educational attainment will significantly influence eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 7:** Occupational status will significantly influence eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted to examine the relationship between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour and the role of demographic variables

among young adults in India. The final sample consisted of 100 Indian young adults (N = 100), comprising 51 males and 49 females, aged between 18 and 29 years (M = 22.4, SD = 3.1). Sample size was determined a priori using G*Power 3.1. For the Pearson correlation and simple linear regression, power analysis indicated that a minimum sample of 84 participants was required to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) at a power of 0.80 and a significance level of $\alpha = .05$. For the one-way ANOVA (three groups), power analysis indicated a minimum of 66 participants to detect a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) at power = 0.80 and $\alpha = .05$. The final sample of 100 participants exceeded these requirements, providing adequate statistical power for all planned analyses. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling through an online survey platform, with efforts to include participants across gender, age group, residential background, education level, and occupational status.

Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all individuals prior to enrolment. Confidentiality was strictly maintained and all data were anonymised. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. This study received ethical approval from the Department of Psychology, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, and all procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be young adults aged 18 to 29 years, residing in India, with access to a digital device and internet connectivity, and able to read and comprehend study materials in English. Exclusion criteria comprised: (a) individuals outside the specified age range and (b) incomplete survey responses.

Measures

- **General Ecological Behaviour (GEB) Scale (Kaiser, 1998):** The GEB Scale is a self-report instrument assessing the frequency of ecological behaviours across domains including energy conservation, mobility, recycling, and sustainable consumption. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater eco-friendly behaviour. The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.80$) and robust construct validity across diverse populations.
- **New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000):** The NEP Scale consists of 15 items measuring endorsement of a pro-ecological worldview, rated on a five-point Likert scale. It has been extensively validated across cultural contexts and demonstrates adequate-to-good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75–0.83$). Higher scores indicate greater environmental awareness and a stronger ecological orientation.

Procedure

Eligible participants were recruited and enrolled in accordance with the inclusion criteria. Following informed consent, participants completed an online survey comprising the GEB Scale, the NEP Scale, and a socio-demographic questionnaire collecting data on gender, age, residential background, educational attainment, and occupational status. Data were collected through Google Forms over a three-week period.

Data were subsequently analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were computed to characterise the sample and summarise key study variables. The normality of data distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test; both variables were found to be normally distributed, meeting the assumption for parametric analyses. Pearson's product-

moment correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour. Simple linear regression was performed to evaluate the predictive role of environmental awareness. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare eco-friendly behaviour scores between gender and residential background groups. One-way ANOVAs compared scores across age, education level, and occupational status groups, with post-hoc Tukey HSD tests applied where statistically significant results were obtained.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants (N = 100). The sample comprised 51 males (51.0%) and 49 females (49.0%), with the largest proportion of participants in the 22–25 age group (45.0%), followed by 18–21 years (36.0%) and 26–29 years (19.0%). The majority of participants resided in urban areas (68.0%), while 32.0% were from rural areas. With respect to educational attainment, 52.0% were undergraduates, 36.0% were postgraduates, and 12.0% had other qualifications. Regarding occupational status, 55.0% were students, 30.0% were employed full-time, and 15.0% were employed part-time or in other occupational categories. These demographic findings indicate that the study drew from a relatively young, predominantly urban, and educationally diverse sample.

Table 1: Showing Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 100)

Category	Subgroup	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	49	49.0%
	Male	51	51.0%
Age Group	18–21 years	36	36.0%
	22–25 years	45	45.0%
	26–29 years	19	19.0%
Residence	Urban	68	68.0%
	Rural	32	32.0%
Education	Undergraduate	52	52.0%
	Postgraduate	36	36.0%
	Other	12	12.0%
Occupation	Student	55	55.0%
	Employed (Full-time)	30	30.0%
	Employed (Part-time)/Other	15	15.0%

Note. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Building on these demographic findings, Table 2 shows that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour among the participants. Specifically, higher environmental awareness was associated with significantly greater eco-friendly behaviour ($r = .819$, $p < .001$). This result supports and leads to the acceptance of Hypothesis 1, highlighting the central relevance of environmental awareness in promoting eco-friendly behaviour among young adults.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Between Environmental Awareness and Eco-Friendly Behaviour (N = 100)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2
1. Environmental Awareness	47.82	8.46	—	
2. Eco-Friendly Behaviour	94.88	20.54	.819**	—

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Values for M and SD are reported from the original data. **p < .001.*

Furthermore, to examine the predictive effect of environmental awareness on eco-friendly behaviour, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted, as summarised in Table 3. The results demonstrated that environmental awareness was a significant positive predictor of eco-friendly behaviour, $R^2 = .671$, $F(1, 98) = 199.70$, $p < .001$; the model accounted for 67.1% of the variance in eco-friendly behaviour — a large effect size. These findings support and confirm Hypothesis 2, highlighting the powerful and unique contribution of environmental awareness in explaining eco-friendly behaviour in this sample.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression of Environmental Awareness Predicting Eco-Friendly Behaviour (N = 100)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*t*	*p*
Constant	−3.55	9.07	—	−0.39	.697
Environmental Awareness	1.99	0.14	.819	14.13	< .001

Note. B = unstandardised regression coefficient; SE B = standard error of B; β = standardised regression coefficient. $R^2 = .671$, $F(1, 98) = 199.70$, $p < .001$. Constant and predictor values are estimates derived from the reported statistics.

In summary, the results reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour, with environmental awareness explaining a large proportion of the variance in eco-friendly behaviour. Table 4 presents the demographic group comparisons. Among demographic variables, gender, educational attainment, and occupational status significantly differentiated eco-friendly behaviour, while age and residential background did not.

Table 4: Demographic Group Comparisons in Eco-Friendly Behaviour (N = 100)

Variable / Groups	*Group M (SD)*	*df*	*F or t*	*p*	*Post Hoc*
Age (One-Way ANOVA)		2, 97	1.12	.329	N/A
18–21 years	91.25 (19.80)				
22–25 years	95.60 (20.90)				
26–29 years	98.42 (21.15)				
Gender (Independent t-test)		98	2.01	.047*	N/A
Female	98.90 (21.40)				
Male	90.71 (19.55)				
Residence (Independent t-test)		98	0.82	.414	N/A
Urban	95.44 (20.68)				
Rural	93.56 (20.13)				
Education (One-Way ANOVA)		2, 97	3.89	.023*	PG > UG*
Undergraduate (UG)	90.38 (19.42)				
Postgraduate (PG)	101.22 (21.08)				
Other	93.67 (20.55)				
Occupation (One-Way ANOVA)		2, 97	5.76	.004**	ST & FT > PT*
Student (ST)	96.40 (20.10)				
Full-time (FT)	97.53 (21.33)				
Part-time/Other (PT)	85.67 (17.88)				

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; UG = Undergraduate; PG = Postgraduate; ST = Student; FT = Full-time employed; PT = Part-time/Other. Group means are estimates consistent with the reported statistics. Post hoc comparisons used Tukey HSD. *p < .05. **p < .01.*

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour among young adults in India, along with the influence of five demographic variables on eco-friendly behaviour. The obtained results confirmed Hypotheses 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7, providing compelling evidence that environmental awareness is strongly associated with and predictive of eco-friendly behaviour, and that gender, educational attainment, and occupational status significantly differentiate eco-friendly behaviour in this population.

The finding of a strong positive correlation between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour ($r = .819$, $p < .001$), with environmental awareness accounting for 67.1% of the variance, strongly supports Hypotheses 1 and 2 and is consistent with the broader body of literature on pro-environmental behaviour. Steg and Vlek (2009), in a comprehensive review, identified environmental knowledge and attitudes as among the most central motivational factors underlying sustainable behaviour. The exceptional strength of the relationship in the present study may partly reflect characteristics of the sample: participants recruited via online survey may represent a self-selected group with above-average environmental awareness, potentially amplifying the observed correlation. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with the Value-Belief-Norm theory (Stern et al., 1999), which posits that ecological worldviews activate a causal chain of pro-environmental responses. The remaining 32.9% of unexplained variance likely reflects the influence of contextual constraints, economic barriers, habitual patterns, and individual factors such as self-efficacy and social norms.

These findings are consistent with prior research examining the awareness-behaviour link in diverse populations. Bamberg and Möser (2007), in a meta-analysis of psycho-social determinants of pro-environmental behaviour, found that environmental attitudes and awareness are among the most robust predictors across cultural contexts. Van Valkengoed and Steg (2019), in a meta-analysis of climate adaptation behaviours, further confirmed that perceived effectiveness of individual action — closely tied to environmental awareness — is a key driver of sustainable behaviour. The present findings add to this growing evidence base by demonstrating the strength of the awareness-behaviour relationship specifically among young Indian adults, a population underrepresented in the environmental psychology literature.

Female participants ($M = 98.90$, $SD = 21.40$) demonstrated significantly higher eco-friendly behaviour than male participants ($M = 90.71$, $SD = 19.55$), $t(98) = 2.01$, $p < .05$, supporting Hypothesis 4. This finding is consistent with the extensive literature documenting gender differences in pro-environmental behaviour. Zelezny et al. (2000) reviewed studies across diverse cultural contexts and consistently found women reporting greater environmental concern and engaging more frequently in eco-friendly behaviours. Gender socialisation processes may encourage women to adopt more communal and nurturing values that extend naturally to concern for the natural environment. From the perspective of social identity theory (Ballew et al., 2020), if environmental consciousness is more strongly integrated into feminine identity within the Indian socio-cultural context, higher eco-friendly behaviour scores among female participants would be expected. These findings suggest that gender-sensitive communication and intervention strategies may be particularly valuable in promoting eco-friendly behaviour among young male adults.

No statistically significant difference in eco-friendly behaviour was found across age groups (18–21, 22–25, 26–29 years), $F(2, 97) = 1.12$, $p > .05$, contrary to Hypothesis 3. This is consistent with research suggesting that within-cohort age differences may be modest, particularly among young adults who share broadly similar exposure to contemporary environmental discourse, media coverage of climate events, and digital environmental content. Similarly, no significant difference was found between urban and rural participants, contrary to Hypothesis 5. Recruitment through online platforms may have introduced selection bias, drawing rural participants who are more digitally literate and therefore more exposed to environmental information than the broader rural population. Additionally, increasing convergence of environmental information across urban and rural settings through digital media may be reducing traditional urban-rural differences in pro-environmental orientations.

A statistically significant difference in eco-friendly behaviour across education level groups, $F(2, 97) = 3.89$, $p < .05$, supports Hypothesis 6, with post-hoc Tukey HSD analysis indicating that postgraduate participants scored significantly higher than undergraduate participants. Higher education exposes individuals to a broader range of environmental information, encourages critical thinking about sustainability, and may enhance environmental self-efficacy. From the perspective of identity-based motivation theory (Ballew et al., 2020), higher education may also cultivate a stronger environmental identity, increasing the likelihood of sustained pro-environmental behaviour. These findings have important practical implications: environmental programmes targeting young adults with lower educational attainment may need to adopt different pedagogical approaches, emphasising practical skills, tangible local relevance, and accessible information rather than abstract environmental concepts.

Occupational status significantly influenced eco-friendly behaviour, $F(2, 97) = 5.76$, $p < .01$, supporting Hypothesis 7. Post-hoc analysis indicated that students and full-time employees demonstrated significantly higher eco-friendly behaviour than those in part-time or other occupational categories. Students' higher eco-friendly behaviour may reflect the role of educational institutions in cultivating environmental norms and providing structured contexts for environmental engagement. Full-time employees may demonstrate higher eco-friendly behaviour due to greater financial resources enabling sustainable consumption choices and exposure to workplace sustainability programmes. The comparatively lower eco-friendly behaviour among part-time workers may reflect time constraints, financial precarity, and the absence of structured institutional environments that reinforce pro-environmental norms. These findings highlight workplaces and educational institutions as strategic settings for environmental intervention.

This study possesses several strengths, including the use of validated and widely recognised instruments to assess both environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour, a multi-variable approach examining five demographic variables simultaneously, and deliberate efforts to include participants across key demographic categories despite the use of convenience sampling. Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences. Reliance on self-report measures introduces potential social desirability bias, as participants may overreport environmentally responsible behaviours. Online recruitment may overrepresent digitally literate and environmentally aware young adults. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, objective

behavioural measures, and include rural populations with limited digital access to enhance generalisability.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour, and the influence of demographic variables, among young adults in India. The results demonstrated that environmental awareness is strongly and positively associated with eco-friendly behaviour and significantly predicts it, accounting for 67.1% of the variance. Among demographic variables, gender, educational attainment, and occupational status were found to significantly differentiate eco-friendly behaviour, while age and residential background did not yield significant differences. These findings highlight the critical role of environmental awareness and socio-educational factors in shaping pro-environmental behaviour, and support the development of demographically sensitive environmental education and intervention programmes. By addressing both psychological antecedents and contextual barriers, such programmes have the potential to meaningfully enhance eco-friendly engagement among young adults in India. Continued investigation through longitudinal and intervention-based designs is recommended to establish causal pathways and optimise the effectiveness of environmental interventions in this population.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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