

## HUMAN ENVIRONMENT INTERFACE : EFFECTS AND REMEDIES

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### ABSTRACT

During the course of sensitive humanitarian studies, related to socio cultural changes, Environmental Psychology emerged as an independent Branch of Psychology which focused environmental/psychological problems closely linked with the life on earth. Interventions are now inevitable to get over or meet out the man made or environmental hazards, tragedies and disasters. Not only known natural disaster tragedies and environmental psychological impacts on man are important but irresponsible behaviour towards environment which has aggravated natural disasters requires much attention.

Only supportive interventions based on psychological understanding will be remedy for regulating the ret-race of mankind towards development and preventing/maintaining homeostasis and congruity in environment on earth. It will serve as a cement to strengthen the coexistence of natural/built, Ambient/inter-personal, and urban/rural environment and man.

**Key Words :** Environmental psychology, Man-made, Natural, intervention, Remedies.

### INTRODUCTION

During the course of sensitive humanitarian studies, related to socio-cultural changes, environmental psychology emerged as an independent branch of psychology during 1960s, which focused on the environmental/psychological problems, closely linked with the life on earth. Ittelson first introduced the term Environmental Psychology at a conference held at American Hospital Association in New York.<sup>4</sup> Then after several theoretical models and paradigm were proposed and suggested by psychologists. However, the basic perspectives that environmental psychology adopts are the interactional framework, both in terms of person-environment transaction as well as nature- nurture interaction. However, no unifying theory exists and different scientists

have different ways of conceptualizing the major theoretical approaches.

The early interest of the environmental psychologists was in studying the causes and effects of urban architects<sup>11</sup> and urban pollution. However, environmental psychology as a specialized discipline within psychology has lost much of its visibility as a unique area within psychology over the past decade.<sup>13</sup> As far as environmental psychology is concerned, it seems that there is lack of continuity of research in the field during the last decades. However, the recent changes in the environmental and ecological conditions have drawn attention of psychologists towards the vast scope of research and its application in the field of environmental psychology.

It is a well-established fact that our surroundings affect our sense of wellbeing, our work, our learning, our recovery from illness, and our mental health. These surrounding consists of both natural as well as manmade environment. Environment essentially is natural e.g., geographical and climatic conditions, however, many a time we mould it so as to create an artificial environment that are found near to the place we live in. Examples of manmade environment are schools, house, roads, dams, different monuments etc. These manmade environments have several effects and ill effect on humans as well as on the natural environment in which we live.

Psychologists have studied the effect of crowding versus open spaces, rapid social and technological change, of changing jobs and relocating families, of living in high-rises and underground and in submarines, and of colors and windows<sup>1</sup>. The results of these researches have been applied both in urban and suburban planning along with the field of architectural designing and planning, e.g. design of homes, hospitals, and schools, and in organizational and governmental policy making, as well.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The field of environmental psychology is not limited only to the psychologists but it can be best summarized as an interdisciplinary science that focuses on the micro as well as macro level interplay between human beings and their surrounding environment. The science of environmental psychology is an independent branch of psychology; however, it is not limited to psychology per se and encompasses a number of areas, including such disciplines as architectural and ecological psychology, environmental design and sociology, and social ecology. In order to be effective, an environmental psychologist commonly draws information from a number of other areas, such as anthropology, architecture, political science, psychology, and urban planning and design with the overall purpose of helping various design

professionals (such as architects, interior designers, and urban planners) work together to improve the overall human environment, not only for the personal living space level (micro level) but also at the larger, all-encompassing level (macro level).

At the personal level, the principles of environmental psychology helps in making people's homes feel more livable and in providing them with a sense of well being while in the home on a daily basis. At the larger level environmental psychology is useful for making entire communities and cities not only function more effectively, but also for making common spaces more inviting. Environmental psychology techniques can be employed to make public areas more aesthetically pleasing to the residents of cities, as well. For instance, many urban areas have begun installing artwork in public places for all their citizens to enjoy<sup>7</sup>.

At a personal level, a working knowledge of environmental psychology can be used to great advantage when it comes to selling one's home more quickly and at a higher price. When a homeowner is familiar with environmental psychology techniques and understands what makes a home aesthetically pleasing, they can use that information to "stage" their home before putting it on the market, thus making it considerably more appealing to potential buyers, even if the effects of environmental psychology are too subtle to be recognized at a conscious level.

As more is learned about the scientific basis of environmental psychology, its concepts and techniques will become increasingly more important to society. Whether it's at the individual level, in our homes, or on a city wide scale, through the use of well-designed and aesthetically pleasing public spaces, environmental psychology will continue to play an ever more crucial role in improving the overall quality of human life as time goes by. Although we do not always recognize it, we

are deeply affected by the physical world around us. To understand the daily experiences, one must consider one's relationship to the surroundings more carefully. In this course, it seems that there is a need to explore the nature of people's interrelationships with space and place and the way this interaction is harming the entire setting we live in.

It has been mentioned that the field of environmental psychology takes an interdisciplinary approach so as to explore people in a physical context, bringing together elements of the social sciences (psychology, geography, anthropology and sociology) and the design disciplines (landscape architecture, architecture and urban planning) to provide a richer understanding of the complex dynamic between people and their physical surroundings.

The analysis of various theoretical approaches to environmental psychology leads to the notion that environment has a long lasting effect on behaviour and that the behaviour can affect the environment as well. For example, the extent to which individual resident's psychological reactions such as dissatisfaction, disturbance and annoyance to community noise can be predicted from their noise exposure is low. Evidence suggests that reaction is only minimally influenced by demographic variables such as age and gender but is substantially influenced by psychological factors such as noise sensitivity and attitudes towards the noise source, as well as the noise itself.<sup>9</sup> However, considerable variance in reaction remains unaccounted for even after the psychological factors are considered. This suggests that influential variables remain to be discovered and/or the measurement of relevant variables is inadequate. In addition to reactions such as disturbance and annoyance, community noise may contribute to mental health problems and physiological states such as elevated blood pressure. Like reaction, these consequences of noise may be influenced by psychological

factors. It is suggested that more rigorous and better-standardized measurements of the psychological variables and reaction itself are desirable. Additional possible psychological variables are suggested, based on the application of theories of response to uncontrollable and unpredictable events.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the history of the world we have learned that there has been many disasters that are both man made and natural. The Tsunami, and the Bhopal Gas Tragedy are the examples of natural as well as manmade environmental catastrophe' that have impacted the lives of millions of people in India and other countries (for Tsunami). These two incidences have evinced that disasters are unpredictable and may strike quickly without any warning. They may be weather related- such as, the Tsunami, hurricanes, or floods, accident-related- such as, road and air accidents, industrial accidents like leakage of poisonous gases (Bhopal Gas, etc.), or drowning, or, illness-related- such as, AIDS, cancer or other deaths due to illness, or, bizarre and unusual- such as in the case of snipers or a murder. These events may be frightening for adults, but they are incredibly traumatic for children if they don't know what to do. Helping young people avoid or overcome emotional problems in the wake of violence or disaster is one of the most important challenges faced by parent, teachers, and mental health professionals.

In the wake of any disaster or catastrophe' apparent threat to the wellbeing is perceived which shapes the coping behaviour of an individual. The threats associated with the mortal disasters also elicit behaviors showing concern towards it. A UN envoy for tsunami recovery has indicated that human behavior and environmental changes are primarily responsible for growing impact of natural disasters, and argue that substantial resources and new policies are needed for effective disaster prevention.<sup>12</sup> Schwartz has

also argued that behavior of man is one of the major responsible factors for many of the natural catastrophe. The irresponsible behaviour of man has lead to the overall growth in population, rapid urbanization, migration, and poverty that ultimately leads to environmental degradation.

The environment-behaviour interaction has interesting results in terms of its consequences. Barker<sup>2</sup> developed the theory that social settings influence behavior and the "behavior setting" remains a valid principle that has received serious attention all over. In this line, environmental psychologists have also theorized that density and crowding can have an adverse effect on mood and even cause stress-related illness.<sup>8-14</sup> Accordingly, environmental and architectural designs could be adapted to minimize the effects of crowding in situations when crowding cannot be avoided. Noise increases environmental stress, the noxious feeling of threat to the wellbeing of a person.<sup>5-6</sup> Although it has been found that control and predictability are the greatest factors in stressful effects of noise; context, pitch, source and habituation are also important variables. The hostile and scarce environment makes people aggressive and aggressiveness necessitates artificial moral control. Thus, it is clear that environment influences behavior at several levels. Immediate behavior is a function of the settings in which it occurs and the persons approach to the environment is characterized by one of aggression, competition, exploitation and manipulation. The characteristic personality make-up of individuals in a country is shaped by the nature and type of environment to which they are subjected for long periods of time.

People exposed to hostile and scarce environments become practical and their approach to their environment is unique so as to display the artificial moral control over themselves and the environment. It is said that science and technology are the result of this

kind of approach to the environment.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, many studies demonstrate the deleterious influence of urbanization on human behavior.<sup>3</sup> Instinctual behavior patterns of human beings also seem to break down under artificial and overpopulated urban conditions. It has been shown that the incidence of mental illness increases with urbanization. The highest incidence of schizophrenia is in the urban areas around the world and only about one fifth of the population of big cities seems to be relatively free from debilitating symptoms of pathology. Similarly, crime rates in big cities are increasing at an alarming rate and many of the major cities of the world have become shelters for crime. The breakdowns of instinctive behavior patterns are also indicated by increasing violence of mothers towards their children and the rising rates of divorce and illegitimacy.

There has been link with the climatic changes and moods of people. The way we have been using the natural resources has become a concern for the human community. The unpredictable events of natural disasters are one of the consequences of human greediness to develop at the cost of environmental degradation. Continuously we have been facing erratic climatic changes that have affected the human wellbeing. The three temperaments, as discussed in ancient Indian texts, are also guided by the changes in one's climatic conditions. Hot and humid climate is indicative of tamsic temperament characterized by laziness and attitude of surrender, moderate climate, on the other hand, is indicative of satwik temperament that is characterized by self-awareness and the relationship of the environment to one's adjustment. The cold climate presumably generates, in people, the rajsik temperament that is characterized by hard work so as to keep themselves alive in the harsh cold conditions. Studies have shown that closeness to elements of nature like pools, plants and trees makes people more relaxed.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, the scientists are worried about the degradation of nature in the process of development and for the town planners and architects one of the main considerations is to incorporate elements of nature in their designs.

### CONCLUSION

All human action has some environmental footprint. Development is always on the cost of some type of degradation whether in form of value, culture or environmental degradation. In this condition, interventions are inevitable to get over or meet out the man-made or environmental hazards, tragedies and disasters. Not only known-natural disasters, tragedies and environmental psychological impacts on man are important, but irresponsible behaviour towards environment, which has aggravated natural disasters, requires much attention.

The ever-increasing population on the earth itself is the biggest environmental problem, which we are facing. Understanding human behavior starts with learning the way that people notice and understand environment. The psychological intervention programme may need to include the dimension of population so as to educate and sensitize people with regard to the impact of human behaviour on environment and vice-versa. Interventions, in this regard, should be directed towards inculcating such habits and attitude that restrains the exploitory behaviour and instills the optimum usage model among the human beings. It can include the tri-dimensional elements (**Fig.1**), namely, cognitive, conative and affective, where in at cognitive level attempts should be made to change the indifferent attitude and instill the positive outlook towards the environment. Further, conative aspect of intervention may be directed towards changing the indifferent behaviour towards eco-friendly behaviour so that people learn to care their environment and create a balance between their needs and sustainability

of environment. The affective component includes developing a sense of love and feeling of joy while being in the balanced environmental conditions. These types of practices in India were already present during the ancient Vedic period in the form of different religious prayers, rituals and activities.

Thus, supportive interventions based on psychological understanding may be a remedy for regulating the rat race of mankind towards development and preventing/maintaining homeostasis and congruity in environment on earth. It will serve as a cement to strengthen the coexistence of natural/built, Ambient/inter-personal, and urban/rural environment and man. It seems that the future trend of research should focus on finding new and effective ways of sensitizing people towards behaving in eco-friendly manner. Research should not only deal with developing new behaviour models but also creating a database regarding their perception of environment and its importance in their life. Studying social representation of place, in this regard, also becomes important.

The only way we can save our future generation from extinction is to check our behaviour today and enrich the environment what we have been bestowed with.

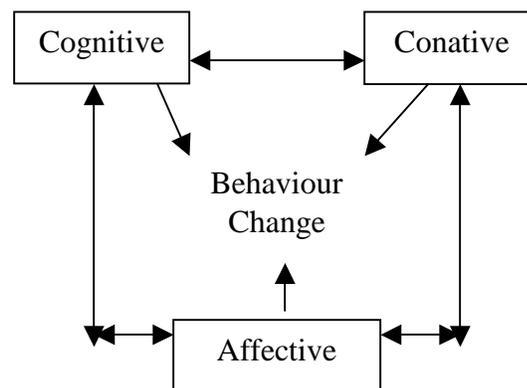


Fig. 1 : Tri-dimensional intervention model

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## IMPORTANT DATES

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