

## Social Impact of Environmental Degradation

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**ABSTRACT:** *The main aim of this paper is to view the differences that are present in society based on parameters like education, occupation, age, gender and various other socio-demographic factors that have their impacts on the perseverance and exposure to various types of pollution. Not every layer of society is impacted by pollution in same manner. Many are polluters and others are polluted. This study will try to examine how sociological factor which is job is associated with maximum exposure to pollution. Various habits like consuming tobacco and smoking are acting as a catalyst to pollution exposures. Education too played its part in exposure and treatment of pollution. People with higher level of education tend to be more aware of pollution and its effects. The issue that most effected are the young age people have been pointed out in this paper. Various health concerns revolving around due to pollution is also brought in light along with different kinds of pollution and its effects on society.*

**Keywords:** *Air, environment, health, pollution, social*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In modern times and ever changing societies there has been continuous rise in problems related to environment due to technological changes. There is a shift in studies from early twentieth century to second half of twentieth century. Earlier the studies are mostly related to conservation of nature and natural environment, but later it shifted towards the awareness of incidents of environment disasters which can be termed as activism towards environment. These environmental problems came to be linked to social problems. Recently there has been ample coverage of pollution related environmental issues in media. The link has been established between the social sciences and environmental studies. Due to wide coverage of issue across various broadcasting mediums, this issue of pollution and environment has been given due consideration in every section of society which not only imparting awareness but also playing a key role in policy framework which ultimately is affecting the decision making of public machineries. Environmental problems have various implications on human kind and on animals as well. The risks include biological, physical and chemical areas that are pressurising human health and more serious ones are coming out to be responsible for loss of lives. Environment is one thing that will have its affect equally to all sections of society living in a particular circle. Many

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people misunderstood that it will not have an effect on them, but it is not like this. Though a consideration of who is evaluating the risk on whom should also be taken care of. The risk management and assessment of environment should also encompass the dimensions of psychological and social while evaluating the risk within environment. It is true to say that environmental risks are not equally distributed in a particular demography and there exists an unequal distribution.

### II. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION(WHO) ON POLLUTION

As per the 2002 estimate of WHO, air pollution in cities are responsible for around 46 lost life years and approximately 8 lakh deaths in a given year across the world. It is to be noted that 66 per cent of those lost life years and deaths are found to be in Asian region. This simply implies that burden of environmental problems that leads to bad health is not equally distributed. Though the particulates of air pollution are similar throughout the world but, the impact of them and severity of exposure along with different nutritional status, physical status, health status and the health infrastructure available in different parts of world are different. These factors combined with climatic factors can give an idea about difference in environmental conditions between western world and Asia.

### III. ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

To understand environmental pollution let us start by defining term "pollution" in light of social sciences. It means "an addition or excessive addition of certain materials to the physical environment (water, air and lands), making it less fit or unfit for life" (Shankar, 49). It is pollutants that are associated with the pollution. These pollutants are particles that change the natural quality of different components of environment. They may be further classified into several types depending upon the criteria for classification. For example if they are said to be classified on basis of nature of disposal then pollutants will either be bio-degradable or non-biodegradable. Sewage for example is the highest quantity of pollutant that is produced every day in urban world. This sewage needs to be degraded by action of microbes so that their waste doesn't harm the water bodies.

Another type of pollutant's classification is based on type of origin, like it may be natural or anthropogenic.

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#### IV. CAUSES OF POLLUTION

Pollution is generated due to any of the following or in combination of the following factors:

- Urbanization
- Exploitation of Nature
- Population explosion
- Fast paced Industrialization
- Factors such as forest fires, volcano eruption, winds, radioactivity etc.

#### V. URBANIZATION IN INDIA

Environment pollution in Asian region and particularly in Indian subcontinent is linked to changing trends of social and economic developments. Many urban areas of India are affected by air pollution due to fast pace of urbanization, industrialization, migration and development of slums, increasing demand of transportation. Recently Delhi NCT region is in news following deteriorating air pollution condition in region. Many steps are being put forward by Government of Delhi to curb the alarming situation. India as a whole is affected by severe air pollution situation mainly due to rapid economic development which can be viewed by the factors which are mentioned above. There has been increase in pace of migration from rural areas to urban areas which is pressurising the urban sprawls both in terms of land pressure and air pressure. India as a country till now comprised of rural population which is 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of total population but above factors of urbanization and industrialization is changing these figures at a fast rate.

Historically duration from late nineties to mid-twenties there has been steep rise in pollution levels in Delhi NCT. In fact, mid-twenties has the maximum environmental pollution load which is contributed by factors which are industrialization, transportation requirement, and domestic areas which along with meteorological conditions added natural dust to existing pollution making situations more serious. The contribution percentage from 1970s to 2001 as per Ministry of Environment and Forests can be seen with the help of following Figure 1.

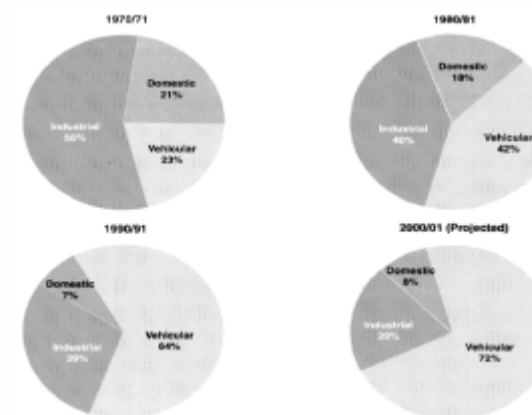


Figure 1: Contribution of Various Sectors to Ambient Air Pollution (Source: MoEF)

It is clear from the above picture that contribution of vehicles towards air pollution had increased steeply from 1971 levels of 23 percent to the increased level of 72 percent in 2001.

#### VI. IMPACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH

India has been the witness of Bhopal disaster cum tragedy. It is caused by public exposure to methyl-isocyanate which was leaked from Union Carbide plant. This particular incident is an example of what impact air pollutant can have on health of people. The adverse effect is combination of three factors which are duration of exposure, susceptibility and concentration of pollutes particles. Susceptibility to pollutant is different to different demography of people. There is a direct link between human health and pollution. There has been a study undertaken by World Bank in 1995 on economic impact of environmental problems in India. As per it the cost towards health due to air pollution was found to be 1310USD million whereas air pollution share in total cost of environment degradation was found to be 14 percent. It is also important to mention that deaths due to pollutes in air was lower in Indian capital Delhi than in USA cities. But, it striking point is that deaths in India occur in early age which means loss of very important life years of a person. It affects severely the age group of 15years to 44 years. It is primarily the work age population which affects the demographic dividend of India. This situation thus needed to be focussed more upon. For this it is evident that improvement in quality of air is much needed to curtail the premature deaths in country. Not just deaths but the illness of a person that he/she suffers from bad air quality affects the very fabric of a happy family. It breaks ties of a family

economically when a bread winner falls ill. It reduces the work time of a productive person. Illness further increases the medical expense which is just another economic factor but mentally whole family is at the sufferer side. The recreational time which a healthy person enjoys is lowered. These things constitute the social fabric of society. It is clear that pollution in general but air pollution in particular affects the society as a whole and family unit as an individual.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Thus, it is clear that unplanned infrastructure growth and sudden rise in transport vehicles has created serious concerns for both urban people who were there since ages and also to ones who migrated from rural areas. This has not just put pressure on atmosphere and ambience of air but also on the land as well. Flushing out of urban waste has been more challenging in recent times. Public are prone to diseases that are related to throat, lungs, liver, stomach, skin etc. The main constituent of human being water is also scarce in urban areas. Cementing of natural land has slowed down the recharge rate of ground water. People can't live longer in happy state in this kind of polluted environment. So, the time has come that cleansing of environment has to be taken care of at war level. Not just particular person is a stakeholder in this scenario but each and every individual has to take lead in combatting air pollution. Many abatement techniques are being implemented by government in different regions of country. Like replacing public transport that were earlier run on diesel engines now are being phased out by CNG engines which are having low carbon foot prints. Recently, Delhi government is going to run a trial of even-odd private transport system to lower the emissions from petrol and diesel engines. Overall these are few things that are done at central and state level. Yet, public participation and public awareness has to be utilised at more serious level because fight against environment degradation cannot be fought alone but it should be a mass movement.

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