International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health 2025; 12(5): 136-139

P-ISSN: 2394-1685
E-ISSN: 2394-1693
Impact Factor (RJIF): 5.93
IJPESH 2025; 12(5): 136-139

https://www.kheljournal.com
Received: 12-07-2025
Accepted: 14-08-2025

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Environmental responsibility among young adults in Kashmir: A cross-sectional study

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Abstract
Environmental responsibility the awareness, attitudes, and behaviors individuals adopt to protect and sustain their environment is a critical component of global sustainability goals. This study examined environmental responsibility among young adults in Kashmir, with a focus on gender differences and the prevalence of specific environmentally responsible practices. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was administered to 120 participants (65 females, 55 males) aged 18–30 years. The questionnaire, based on the Healthy Lifestyle Scale (HLS) developed by Wani *et al*. (2025), included items on waste management, energy conservation, sustainable transport, water preservation, and participation in environmental activities.
Findings revealed high participation in waste segregation (82.5%), energy conservation (78.3%), and water-saving practices (85.0%). However, sustainable transport usage (42.5%) and active participation in community environmental initiatives (36.7%) were lower. Gender analysis showed females were slightly more engaged in household environmental actions, while males reported higher engagement in community-based initiatives. Barriers to environmental responsibility included lack of awareness (32.5%), inadequate infrastructure (28.3%), and perceived inconvenience (21.7%).
These results underscore the importance of targeted education campaigns, improved infrastructure for recycling and sustainable transport, and community programs that actively engage young adults in environmental stewardship.

Keywords: Environmental responsibility, young adults, Kashmir, sustainability, healthy lifestyle scale

Introduction
Environmental degradation driven by pollution, overconsumption of natural resources, and climate change poses one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century (UNEP, 2023) [6]. Young adults represent a crucial demographic in the global sustainability movement: they are both future leaders and current consumers, whose behaviors directly impact environmental outcomes. Encouraging environmentally responsible practices within this group is essential to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
In the Kashmir region, environmental concerns are amplified by geographic and climatic conditions. Rapid urbanization, seasonal tourism, and population growth strain natural resources, while unique challenges such as icy winters and limited waste disposal infrastructure complicate sustainability efforts. Despite these challenges, cultural values emphasizing harmony with nature may serve as a protective factor, promoting environmental awareness and stewardship.
This study investigates the prevalence and patterns of environmental responsibility among Kashmiri youth, identifying gender-specific trends, barriers, and areas for targeted intervention.

2. Review of Literature
Globally, environmental responsibility among young adults is influenced by factors such as education, cultural norms, access to infrastructure, and perceived self-efficacy (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) [3]. Research has shown that young adults are more likely to adopt pro-environmental behaviors when they perceive tangible benefits, have relevant knowledge, and see these behaviors modeled within their communities (Steg & Vlek, 2009) [5].

In South Asia, urban youth often face a paradox: higher exposure to environmental issues due to pollution and resource scarcity, yet limited participation in environmental programs due to infrastructural and policy gaps (Singh & Gupta, 2021) [4]. Gender differences have been observed, with women typically demonstrating higher engagement in household-based sustainability activities such as waste segregation and water conservation (Hunter *et al*., 2004) [2], while men are more likely to participate in outdoor environmental activities and advocacy.

In the Kashmiri context, studies are limited. However, existing evidence suggests that environmental responsibility may be uneven across domains, with high engagement in practices like energy conservation and tree planting, but lower adoption of sustainable transport options (Dar *et al*., 2022) [1]. This gap highlights the need for localized studies to inform targeted interventions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted to capture environmental responsibility behaviors among young adults.

3.2 Participants

A total of 120 participants (65 females, 55 males) aged 18–30 years were recruited from universities, colleges, and community settings across urban and semi-urban areas of Kashmir.

3.3 Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Healthy Lifestyle Scale (HLS) by Wani *et al*. (2025) [7], which includes an environmental responsibility module designed for regions with icy winters and dry summers.

Survey questions included

1. Do you practice household waste segregation?
2. Do you switch off unused electrical appliances to save energy?
3. Do you use sustainable transport (cycling, walking, public transport) regularly?
4. Do you engage in water-saving practices at home?
5. Do you participate in community environmental initiatives?
6. What barriers prevent you from engaging more in environmental responsibility? (Multiple choice: Lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure, inconvenience, other)

3.4 Data collection

The survey was conducted between April and June 2025, using both online and face-to-face formats. Informed consent was obtained, and responses were anonymized.

3.5 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated using SPSS 26.0. Results are presented in APA 7–formatted tables, each followed by an interpretation referencing the table number.

4. Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 120)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	55	45.8
	Female	65	54.2
Age	18–22	58	48.3
	23–26	40	33.3
	27–30	22	18.3

The sample (Table 1) was relatively balanced by gender, with a slight female majority. Nearly half of the participants were aged 18–22 years, reflecting a largely university-going demographic. This age composition is relevant because younger adults are often more open to adopting new environmental behaviors.

Table 2: Prevalence of environmentally responsible behaviors

Behavior	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Household waste segregation	99 (82.5)	21 (17.5)
Energy conservation (switching off unused appliances)	94 (78.3)	26 (21.7)
Sustainable transport usage	51 (42.5)	69 (57.5)
Water-saving practices	102 (85.0)	18 (15.0)
Participation in community environmental initiatives	44 (36.7)	76 (63.3)

Waste segregation (82.5%) (table 2) and water-saving practices (85.0%) were the most commonly adopted behaviors, indicating strong household-level environmental engagement. However, only 42.5% regularly used sustainable transport, and community initiative participation was limited to 36.7%, suggesting that public and community-based environmental action lags behind private household practices.

Table 3: Gender differences in environmental responsibility

Behavior	Male yes n (%)	Female yes n (%)
Waste segregation	43 (78.2)	56 (86.2)
Energy conservation	41 (74.5)	53 (81.5)
Sustainable transport usage	27 (49.1)	24 (36.9)
Water-saving practices	44 (80.0)	58 (89.2)
Community environmental initiatives	24 (43.6)	20 (30.8)

Females reported higher engagement (table 3) in household-based behaviors such as waste segregation and water conservation, while males showed higher participation in sustainable transport and community environmental initiatives. This pattern is consistent with prior research suggesting that environmental engagement can be gendered, with men and women gravitating towards different domains of action.

Table 4: Reported barriers to environmental responsibility

Barrier	n	%
Lack of awareness	39	32.5
Inadequate infrastructure	34	28.3
Perceived inconvenience	26	21.7
Other	21	17.5

Lack of awareness (32.5%) and inadequate infrastructure (28.3%) emerged as the most significant barriers (table 4). Perceived inconvenience (21.7%) also played a role, reflecting the need for both educational interventions and infrastructural improvements to make environmentally responsible behaviors more accessible and appealing.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the environmental responsibility patterns of young adults in Kashmir. While certain environmentally responsible behaviors were highly prevalent, others were practiced less frequently, suggesting that environmental engagement in this population is uneven across domains.

5.1 Household-level practices

As shown in Table 2, household waste segregation (82.5%) and water-saving practices (85.0%) were the most commonly reported behaviors. This mirrors previous findings by Hunter *et al*. (2004) [2], which showed that individuals often adopt pro-environmental practices that can be performed within the home and require minimal institutional support. The high adoption rates may also reflect cultural values emphasizing frugality and efficient resource use, as well as targeted awareness campaigns in educational institutions.

5.2 Sustainable transport and community initiatives

The lower adoption of sustainable transport (42.5%) and participation in community environmental initiatives (36.7%) in Table 2 reflects a gap in collective and public environmental engagement. This pattern is consistent with Dar *et al*. (2022) [1], who reported that lack of public transport infrastructure and safety concerns limit sustainable mobility choices in Kashmir. Similarly, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) [3] note that participation in community-based environmental programs often requires higher commitment, time, and organizational support, which can deter busy students and young professionals.

5.3 Gender differences in environmental engagement

Gender analysis in Table 3 revealed that females were more engaged in household-based activities such as waste segregation and water conservation, while males reported greater participation in community environmental initiatives and sustainable transport use. These differences align with the gendered environmental behavior theory proposed by Zelezny *et al*. (2000) [9], which suggests that societal roles and expectations influence the type of environmental actions individuals undertake.

5.4 Barriers to environmental responsibility

Barriers reported in Table 4 highlight structural and informational challenges. Lack of awareness (32.5%) remains a key obstacle despite the relatively high adoption of certain behaviors. This may indicate that while awareness exists for some practices, others such as sustainable transport or collective environmental action are less well-promoted. Inadequate infrastructure (28.3%) further limits engagement, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where recycling facilities, public transport, and organized environmental programs are scarce.

5.5 Implications for policy and practice

The findings suggest that while household environmental engagement is strong, public and community-level participation requires strategic intervention. Policy recommendations include:

- Expanding public transport infrastructure to encourage sustainable mobility.
- Increasing the visibility and accessibility of community environmental programs.
- Integrating environmental responsibility modules into educational curricula, as supported by the Healthy Lifestyle Scale (HLS) framework (Wani *et al*., 2025) [8].
- Developing gender-sensitive environmental campaigns that leverage existing strengths in household and community engagement patterns.

6. Conclusion

This study found that young adults in Kashmir demonstrate strong engagement in household-level environmental practices, particularly waste segregation and water conservation. However, participation in sustainable transport and community environmental initiatives remains limited. Gender differences were evident, with females more active in domestic environmental behaviors and males more involved in public and community actions.

Barriers such as lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure, and perceived inconvenience must be addressed through targeted interventions. Sustainable development in the region will require a multi-level approach that combines education, infrastructure development, and inclusive community engagement programs. By harnessing the enthusiasm of young adults and addressing structural barriers, Kashmir can strengthen its contribution to global sustainability goals.

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