

Why do some people embrace green living while others remain indifferent?

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“– Sir, it’s because our circumstances are different. Our bunch is light and free, while those guys spend all day long worried and guarding their ripe grains. What a terrible waste of time! Beautiful sunny days are for singing, dancing, and chattering away...”

–In “Light and Free”; *Wild Wise Weird* ([2024](#))

[SCIENCE NEWS]

Why do some people enthusiastically embrace green living—sorting trash, switching off lights, or purchasing eco-friendly goods—while others remain indifferent? A recent comprehensive study involving over 100,000 participants spanning 37 countries offered fresh insights into these environmental behaviors, challenging some common assumptions along the way [1].

The two authors, Xiangdan Piao (Iwate University, Japan) and Shunsuke Managi (Kyushu University, Japan), did not just inquire about pro-environmental activities. Instead, they dove deep into the heterogeneous interplay of socioeconomic, demographic, subjective, and psychological well-being factors influencing pro-environmental behavior. Their findings? It might not be as simple as we might expect.



Illustration. Well-being and life satisfaction influence our environmental choices (Source: <https://www.imagine.art>)

Consider environmental knowledge as an example. You might assume that the more someone knows about environmental issues, the greener their behavior will be. But here is the twist: this effect isn't uniform. For people who have already engaged in multiple green activities, more knowledge indeed fuels more action. However, for those less involved, additional information may not necessarily spark the green spark [1].

However, perhaps the most intriguing finding was about the wealth effect. Contrary to the idea that richer people can afford to be more eco-friendly, this study found that higher income was actually linked to less green behavior, especially among those already not involved in environmental engagement [1]. This finding contradicts some previous research, raising intriguing questions about the relationship between prosperity and environmental responsibility [2,3].

The study also peered into the emotional lives, revealing that our feelings play a significant role in our green choices as well. Happiness (life satisfaction) and (life) enjoyment were

associated with more eco-friendly actions, while anger and sleeplessness had the opposite effect [1]. It seems our mood might be shaping our planet's health more than we realized—perhaps we should all hope that all tycoons will be happy every day :-)

We are still struggling with ongoing environmental issues like climate change and biodiversity loss. Piao and Managi suggest their findings could help shape a more effective eco-surplus culture—a society where sustainable choices are the norm rather than the exception [4].

So the next time you wonder why your neighbor meticulously sorts their trash and uses reusable bags at the market while others couldn't care less, remember: the answer might be more complex—and surprising—than you think.

References

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