

SURVEY OF ATTITUDES TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN JAPANESE YOUNG PEOPLE

Toshio Kawaraya* and Chiyoko Kawaraya**

*The University of Wales Distance Learning Master of Science Program in Japan

5-12-6 Tedzukayama, Nara, Japan, 631-0062. kawaraya@kcn.ne.jp

**Osaka Shoin Women's University

4-2-26 Hishiyanishi, Higashi-Osaka, Japan, 577-8550. kawaraya.chiyoko@Osaka-shoin.ac.jp

Environmental problems are a focus of concern in the modern age. In particular, emissions of greenhouse gases and dioxins, now present on a global scale, are priority issues urgently needing solutions. In order to reduce environmental impacts through international cooperation and environmental education, it is important to establish the prevailing attitudes in the respective target group or community. How young Japanese people perceive environmental problems is thus a relevant question as they carry the future of the nation on their shoulders and their responses will determine the future course of environmental issues. The present paper reports on a questionnaire survey carried out on specific populations at a women's university and a junior college in Japan.

METHODS

Study group A: 83 female Japanese students (average year of birth 1982) majoring in food nutrition science at a women's university.

Study group B: 56 female and 11 male Japanese students (average year of birth 1982) students majoring in human life sciences at a private junior college.

Study period: Study group A: January 2004

Study group B: October 2003 and January 2004

Study method: Questionnaire, as described below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1-1. What do you rate the state of the environment?

Of all students surveyed, 3/4 thought the state of the environment in Japan to be bad and 1/4 responded that it was good. In comparison with respondents from the women's college, 17% more respondents at the junior college felt good about the environment. Though the majority

of the responses collected from the junior college were “good,” a 15% decrease was seen in comparison to junior college respondents from a survey conducted 3 years previously.

Japanese respondents (%) 2004 (n = 150)

	Good	Reasonable	Bad	Other		Good	Reasonable	Bad	Other
Total students	21	5	74	0	Junior college respondents (%)2000				
	Good	Reasonable	Bad	Other	Good	Reasonable	Bad	Other	
Junior college	34	9	57	0	54	4	38	4	

Table1.What do you rate the state of the environment?

1-2 Which environmental issues concern you?

The top concern of respondents was trash problems (25%), followed by air pollution (23%), and thereafter by water pollution (16%), global-scale pollution (15%; including global warming at 11%), and protection of the natural environment (14%; including forest destruction at 11%).

2. Which do you consider to be the main environmental problems in Japan?

Japanese respondents felt the main urban environmental problems to be 1) automobile exhaust gases (27%), 2) waste water (16%), 3) industrial exhaust gases (15%), 4) noise (12%), 5) solid waste (8%), 6) acid rain (7%), 7) incinerators (7%), and 8) particulate matter (6%). The major problems in agricultural areas were felt to be 1) dioxins (43%), 2) soil pollution by agricultural chemicals (33%), 3) acid rain (15%), and 4) the water supply (4%).

Concerns in other areas were deforestation (51%), over development (25%) and acid rain (10%).

In this survey conducted by the author in 2000 identified automobile exhaust gases (30%) and industrial exhaust gases (22%) as the main urban problems and dioxins (38%) and soil pollution by agricultural chemicals (14%) as the main agricultural area problems. Problems mentioned in relation to other areas were deforestation (30%) and over development (22%). Deforestation in other areas was thus found to have increased markedly.

3. In what order do you rate the seriousness of environmental problems?

Among the respondents, the following order resulted: 1) atmospheric pollution (42%; 40% in 2001), 2) water quality (33%; 22% in 2001), 3) soil (17%; 14% in 2001), 4) noise (8%; 18% in 2001), vibration (2%; 16% in 2001), showing the student respondents to be anxious about environment pollution by automobile exhaust gases.

4. How do you think environmental problems will develop in the near future?

In Japan, in contrast, pessimism is predominant at 77% (64% 2001) against 11% (20%).

They are afraid that waste, deforest, global warming, automobile exhaust gases are increase in the near future.

While, 11% of the students expected that waste is subdivided and recycling becomes popular, and an environment got all right by the progress of modern technology.

5. What is your view of current environmental education for adults and children?

The general view was that environmental education is insufficient at present. Rated not good by 20%, good by 11% and good for children but not for adults by 15% in 2001, respondents in the present survey indicated that:

- there was a lack of education at school
- there was too much emphasis on education over practical matters
- education was important for fostering the individual's awareness
- there is a need for environmental issues to be seen in global terms

6. In order of importance, which overseas industries you would like to see investing in your country?

Enterprises whose investment was least wished for were those in the food industry (18%), petrochemicals (18%; 10% in 2000); power plants (11%), construction (10%), modern technology (9%; 8% in 2000); chemical industries and fishing (7% both surveys). These findings show that while petrochemical industry may be seen as attractive in terms of employment, it is also source of concern an industry placing a heavy burden on the environment. Safety assurances, bans on cross-border movement of toxic substances, concessions to preserve the local environment, and so on were demanded as a preconditions to starting operations.

7. What do you think the sources of dioxins are?

Regarding the sources of dioxins, according to a Vietnamese survey in 2000, 88% of respondents named the war, 54% industry, 30% agriculture, and 27% incinerators. In Japan the causes cited were incineration (55%; 46% 2000), factories (28%; 26% in 2000), and agriculture (13%; 12% in 2000). It is factually accurate that the war in Vietnam still accounts for a large dioxin presence. In Japan, the image of dioxins as generated by malfunctioning incinerators has been strongly imprinted in the public mind.

8. Transportation to place of study:

Preferred modes of transportation were electric train (59%; 72% in 2000), bicycle (19%; 14% in 2000), and walking (9%; 6% in 2000).

Which transportation method do you think is best for the city? Transportation mode favored for cities on the other hand were electric trains (66%; 44% in 2000), subways (8%; 18% in 2000) and monorails (6%; 18% in 2000), with only 5% naming buses and diesel trains (3% in 2000), which are associated with exhaust gas pollution.

9. Do you smoke?

Of the junior college student 69% (40% in 2000) were non-smokers and 31% (29% females only, 54% in 2000) were smokers. While percentage of smokers among the women's university students was 8% and total female student smokers was 17%, the percentage of smokers among the Japanese female junior college students was worryingly high.

10. Do you take measures against indoor air pollution?

Of the respondents, 60% (62% in 2000) took some measures, while 40% (22% in 2000) took none.

11. What kind of environmental support is good for developing countries?

Of the respondents, 87% favored supports including dispatch of personnel to impart knowledge, experience, and methods, 12% favored provision of equipment alone with the remaining 2% preferring other forms of aid.

12. Are you conscious of a company's environmental performance before taking a job?

Of the surveyed respondents, 67% did, 31% did not, with no answer received from the remaining 2%.

CONCLUSION

The present study surveyed attitudes toward environmental problems, including atmospheric pollution; the respondents being 83 female students at a women's university and 67 (56 female and 11 male) students at a junior college in Japan. The survey content covered: (1) appraisal of the state of the environment, (2) awareness of environmental problems in urban, rural and other areas of the respondent's country, (3) rating of environmental problems in order of seriousness, (4) estimation of the future development of environmental problems, (5) evaluation of environmental education for children and adults, (6) opinions relating to investment by overseas industry and business, (7) opinions relating to dioxins, (8) transport to place of study and preferred transport system in respondent's city, (9) smoking status, (10)

measures taken by respondent against indoor pollution, (11) environmental support to developing countries, and (12) corporate environmental performance and job hunting.

Answers from Japanese respondents were as follows. (1) 74% considered their own country's environment to be bad and 30% considered it to be good. (2) 27% viewed automobile exhaust gases as a problem in urban areas and 43% viewed dioxins a problem in rural areas and deforestation as a problem in other areas. (3) The most frequent order was air, water, soil and noise pollution. (4) 77% expected conditions to worsen. (5) The general opinion was that it is important and necessary, and that there is too much emphasis on education over practical matters. (6) Safety assurances, bans on cross-border movement of toxic substances, and concessions to preserve the local environment. (7) Incineration (55%), factories (28%), and agriculture (13%). (8) Electric train (66%), subway (8%), monorail (6%), bus (5%) and diesel train (3%). (9) 31% smokers (17% female) and 69% nonsmokers. (10) 60% of respondents took some measures. (11) Support which includes dispatch knowledgeable personnel (87%). (12) Environmental performance on the part of the enterprise is demanded. Of the surveyed respondents, 67% did, 31% did not, with no answer received from the remaining 2%.