INVESTIGATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES IN TERMS OF SYSTEM LEGITIMATION AND SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

[1]BURÇAK SÖNMEZ, [2]KÜBRA MELTEM KARAOĞLU

Erzurum Technical University, Ankara University
E-mail: [1]burcak.sonmez@erzurum.edu.tr, [2]kmkaraoglu@ankara.edu.tr

Abstract - The main purpose of this research is to determine the relationships between environmental attitudes, social dominance orientation and system justification. In addition, the research examined to what extent environmental attitudes were predicted by the variables considered. There are 191 participants in the research. Research results show that environmental attitudes are predicted by the variables political view, social dominance orientation and system justification. However, it has been observed that as the education level increases, people's positive environmental attitudes increase.

Keywords - Environmental Attitudes, Social Dominance Orientation, System Legitimation

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the critical factors that come to mind regarding public health is environmental problems. Climate change and environmental pollution have many direct and indirect harmful effects on public health. Environmental problems such as global warming, climate change, depletion of natural resources, and questions about the results of road constructions, shopping malls built in natural areas, and widespread thermal power plants carried out by the plans of political actors seem to increase people's interest in the environment in recent years. However, such an increase is only possible for some people. It is observed that some individuals have high levels of environmentalism, while some individuals have low levels of environmentalist attitudes and behavior. However, the increasing environmental destruction suggests this interest should be further intensified. At this point, it seems essential to know the psychological factors underlying individual differences in environmentalism.

Reference [1] states that interest in environmental psychology began in the late 1960s, with the recognition of the importance of human behavior. Research shows that people's environmental approaches are affected by different reasons. For example, many studies show a relationship between people's political orientations and their interest in environmental issues [2], [3], [4]. Similarly, it is stated that people's concern about environmental problems varies in terms of their level of legitimation of the system [5], [6]. Additionally, according to Reference [7], people's approaches to the environment should be considered in terms of their social dominance orientation. According to researchers, people's perception of themselves as hierarchically above nature affects their environmental approach. Considering these studies, this research examines environmental attitudes regarding political orientation system legitimation and social dominance orientation.

According to Social Dominance Theory, societies are structured as group-based social hierarchy systems [8]. This hierarchical structure has subgroups and dominant groups. While dominant groups at the top of the hierarchical structure disproportionately have resources such as political authority, power, and social status, subgroups have negative social values (weak power and social status, low-status professions, etc.). Thus, social dominance orientation (SDO) can be defined as the degree to which individuals support group-based hierarchy and want superior groups to dominate subordinate groups [9], [10].

According to Reference [7], SDO is essential in understanding the human-environment relationship. In this relationship, SDO reveals that humans are hierarchically dominant over nature. In studies examining environmental attitudes together with SDO; SDO was found to be associated with low environmental concern and It seems to predict the denial of problems [7], [11], [12]. Another related study also confirms the negative relationship between SDO and support for environmental policies [13]. System justification theory, developed by Reference [14], tries to understand the psychological processes underlying the legitimation of existing systems. In theory, the concept of "system" refers to families, institutions, social groups, and social arrangements. System justification, conversely, is the approval and legitimation of social, political, and economic situations simply because they exist. Thus, justifying the system ensures the maintenance of current situations. This situation reduces the contradiction towards the system in individuals and ensures the internalization of inequality [14], [15].

Justifying the system prevents people from feeling anxious and guilty in the situations they encounter

[15]. Confirming this information, Reference [6] state that people who justify the system remain inactive in the face of environmental problems and tend not to resist these problems. Similarly, Reference [5] show a positive relationship between system legitimization and environmental problems. Thus, these people do not feel responsible for environmental problems.

A. Method

The research sample consists of 191 participants aged 18-60 from various cities in Turkey. All participants were reached through the online data collection site http://www.surveey.com. 121 (63.3%) of the participants are women and 70 (36.6%) are men. The average age of all participants was 29.83 (SD = 8.76). Participants were given a personal information form created by the researchers, the Social Dominance Orientation Scale, the New Environmental Paradigm Scale, and the System Justification Scale. The data obtained was analyzed with the SPSS 20 program.

B. Results

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between the variables included in the research. According to the results of the analysis, significant and negative relationships were determined between environmental attitudes, SDO, and system justification. However, a significant and positive relationship exists between the participants' political views and environmental attitudes (see Table I).

Stepwise hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to determine the variables that predict environmental attitudes. In the first stage of the analysis, demographic variables such as education and political opinion were included in the equation to control their effects. Then, the system justification was added, and in the last stage, SDO was taken into the equation. As a result of the regression analysis, it is observed that the political view enters the equation first. Political view predicts environmental attitudes positively and explains 7% of the variance in this variable ($F_{2\text{-}189} = 17.73$; $p < .01$). Then, the system justification variable contributes 7% to the variance and predicts environmental attitudes negatively ($F_{2\text{-}188} = 11.58$; $p < .01$). Finally, social dominance orientation negatively predicts environmental attitudes and contributes 6% to the variance. All variables together explain 20% of the total variance (See Table II).

Finally, One Way ANOVA was conducted to determine how environmental attitudes differ according to education level. According to the analysis results, the participants' environmental attitudes vary depending on their education.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1.Environmental Attitudes	-			
2.Political View	.26***	-		
3.System Justification	-.35***	-.46***	-	
4.SDO	-.35***	-.32***	.31***	-

Table I: Correlations for variables
***p < .001. SDO: Social Dominance Orientation**

Variables	B	Beta	R^2	Adjusted R^2	t	F
Political View	2.36	.26	.07	.06	3.74***	14.03***
System Justification	-.23	-.29	.14	.13	-3.86***	14.98***
SDO	-.12	-.26	.20	.18	-3.69***	15.21***

Table 2: Regression Coefficients
***p < .001. SDO: Social Dominance Orientation**

level ($F_{2,188} = p < .05$). The Tukey HSD test was performed to determine which education levels differed significantly. According to the analysis results, the environmental attitude scores of people with high school and college education (M = 51.47) are significantly lower than those with undergraduate and graduate education (M = 56.45).

C. Discussion

This section will discuss the findings obtained as a result of the analyses carried out within the research scope. The fact that all variables considered in the first correlation analysis were found to be significantly related made it possible to conduct other analyses to confirm the purpose of the study. When the results of stepwise hierarchical regression analysis are

examined, political opinion is the first variable that predicts environmental attitudes. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that political opinion positively predicted environmental attitudes. Accordingly, as people's political views approach the left-wing, their positive attitudes towards the environment also increase. When the literature is examined, the findings support this conclusion. Studies show that people on the rights tend to be less supportive of governments' pro-environmental policies and are less willing to attribute the causes of the climate crisis to human factors [17]. Secondly, system justification was found to predict environmental attitudes negatively. Accordingly, people with a high tendency to justify the system have lower concerns about environmental issues and less motivation to do something to protect the environment. It is claimed that justifying the problems caused by the system by people who support the maintenance and protection of existing systems serves to eliminate cognitive dissonance and internalize the perception of inequality [14], [15], [16]. Therefore, people with a high tendency to justify the system seem more likely to support initiatives that directly or indirectly harm the environment, such as factories and roads built as a state policy. Finally, SDO was found to predict environmental attitudes negatively. Accordingly, it has been observed that the environmental attitudes of people with high social dominance orientation are more negative. People with high social dominance orientation argue that societies consist of a hierarchical structure and that it is typical for people at the higher levels of this hierarchy to have greater access to existing resources [8]. When we transfer this view to environmental attitudes, people with high social dominance orientation may see themselves as hierarchically superior to nature and think they have the right to dominate nature. As a result, as a right-wing individual's tendency to legitimize the system and their social dominance orientation increases, their positive attitudes towards the environment decrease. Finally, the research examined how people's environmental attitudes differ according to their education levels. It has been observed that the environmental attitudes of people with high school and college education are more negative than those with university and postgraduate education. The fact that there was no difference in the attitudes of people with low education levels was attributed to the low number of participants with low education levels in the sample.

D. Conclusion

Environmental problems directly related to public health problems (such as climate crisis, environmental pollution, and destruction of natural areas) can only be solved when the factors that cause and sustain these problems can be correctly understood. People's positive attitudes towards the environment are essential in the prevention phase. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the factors that support people's positive relationships with their environment and the factors that cause these relationships to become negative. The current study shows that the more people feel they have power and control over nature, the more they move away from their responsibility to protect nature. Showing these people how they are directly harmed by problems caused by environmental factors and teaching them that there are things they can do to prevent this damage can contribute to the prevention of human-caused environmental problems. However, the findings show that people with a high tendency to legitimize the system avoid questioning and taking action on some initiatives that may harm the environment simply because they are deemed appropriate by those with power in the system. Increasing people's awareness of this issue can contribute to transforming this relationship to benefit the environment. People may demand more pro-environmental projects from the systems and institutions they support and prefer to have an opinion and say about the effects of the projects on the environment. Education is undoubtedly the most powerful tool to make these changes. Consistent with this, the study found that people with higher education levels had higher positive environmental attitudes. Therefore, it is considered necessary for public health to include more topics in education processes, such as relationships with the environment, environmental protection, and the effects of environmental problems on human life. Finally, a limitation is that the number of participants in the study was relatively low and that people from low socioeconomic levels were reached. Future research should consider these limitations and expand on the factors that affect positive environmental attitudes.

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