

The Environment & Psychologists

The dominant paradigms in current psychological teaching, research and practice such as the "publish or perish" processes in academia may be leading to quantity rather than quality of acceptable non-threatening research publications at the expense of innovative quality research and teaching, thereby squashing (or profoundly invalidating) uniqueness, conceptual evolution and intellectual diversity - all of which has a direct bearing on our practices as psychologists.

September 11 2001 was a very significant day when we all recognised that something was terribly wrong and paid some attention! Many people were killed during the terrorist attacks on the USA. On that same day, approximately 24,000 people died of hunger, 6020 children died of diarrhoea and 2,700 children were killed by measles. There were 149 million malnourished children in developing countries, 1,100million people did not have access to safe drinking water, 2,400million people did not have access to safe sanitation, 1, 200million people were surviving on less than one dollar a day. HIV was directly affecting 1.1 million African children under 15, 100 million children were without access to basic education and there were 875million illiterate adults. On the same day, pregnancy and child birth accounted for the death of 515, 000 women, 73,606 people were killed by drought and famine, 200,000 children were killed in conflict and 1.2 million children were made homeless by conflict (New Internationalist, November, 2001 pp 18-20).

Psychologists have specific and demonstrable expertise in effecting major and durable behavioural change in people and in systems! It was a political process that changed a widespread reality where treatments such as ECT and major tranquillisers (some with permanent and disfiguring side effects) were administered as regular and common interventions to those suffering from psychologically treatable conditions such as agrophobia.

We all know that increasing materialism, over-consumption, debt and massive waste are contributing to environmental destruction. It is also true that psychological and social well being are negatively moderated by high levels of materialism. Overpopulation also represent a significant threat to our environments. (Schumaker, 2001; 2002 in press). Interestingly, the best predictor of zero population growth across

cultures and irrespective of material wealth is equality between the genders (Hartmann [www.last hours.com](http://www.lasthours.com)).

Psychologists have a role and a major responsibility towards our urban and natural environments. Our inner realities (developmentally informed biopsychosocial core schemas for filtering the world – if you like) are reflected in our outer environments. Psychologists can help facilitate the emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural evolution of individuals, communities and societies. We really can assist people to develop empathy, to move beyond gender, racial and cultural stereotypes, to consider the longer -term consequences of destructive behaviour and to call back their power as informed and socially responsible consumers.

We can collaboratively develop some goals for our future and a systematic programme to achieve them. We can identify and document the current programmes and resources available in creating change in environmental practices, including their costs and benefits (both economic and social). We can highlight fragmentation, duplication, and hidden and delayed costs. As psychologists, we have the skills to research, draw upon and integrate aspects of specific successful programmes both nationally and internationally. I urge you to use your knowledge and resources in this manner. It is vital for us all.