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Gender Gap in Environmental Activism: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Sociologists have done many studies about the differences between activists and others; But relationship of gender and environmental activism has not been studied empirically in Iranian society. we study about environmental activism of men and women in environmental NGOs in East Azerbaijan Province. Multivariate regression was used for data analysis and the results showed that there is no significant difference between men and women environmental activism in NGOs. In addition, similar factors predict the rate of men and women environmental activism. But the type of actions taken by men and women in environmental NGOs are different; men's actions have taken place at the basic and important levels and women's activism are at the supportive and insignificant levels. Results are consistent with theoretical literature that cites gender division of labor and biographical availability along with enhancing factors of activism in women such as environmental values and environmental concern, as factors of affecting their activism.

Keywords: biographical availability, environmental activism, gender, gender division of labor

Expanded Abstract

Introduction

Environmental activism is a type of environmentally responsible behavior that people engage with in order to protect nature. Sociologists have done many studies about the differences between activists and others, but less attention has been paid to gender differences among activists within environmental movements. Women are more concerned about potential environmental problems than men, so this study assumes that women are more likely to participate in environmental movements.

The main question of this study is whether women members of environmental NGOs are more active than men? And is the level of activity of men and women in environmental organizations different?

Theoretical literature views the impact of gender on activism as different from the impact of gender on other environmentally responsible behaviors, and it is believed that the relationship between gender and environmental activism is determined by cross-factors. As most environmental activism take place outside the home, gender division of labor in to domestic and wage employment has restricted women's access to environmental activism and participation in environmental movements.

Men have more access to higher job opportunities and higher wages than women. Men's greater access to economic resources and opportunities in society makes women dependent and put them in lower status compared to men. The power of men in different fields brings them more power and makes women weaker in the social sphere. Women gradually lose the opportunity to compete with men in their public and private lives. Hence, they turn to lower jobs wages. Unequal division of labor creates ideologies, norms, and stereotypes about men's competencies toward women. On the other hand, responsible environmental behaviors except environmental activism, and occur in everyday behaviors- which are often domestic and unpaid- and among women. Therefore, women are more likely to engage in environmentally responsible behavior than men. Being a mother has a special role in environmental awareness and activism, and this is due to the way women are socialized for care and support roles. Theoretically, women are expected to be more prone to environmental activism if they are mothers.

Various studies have reported conflicting effects of gender on activism. On the one hand, the fields of environmental sociology and ecofeminist theory show that women are more practical than men for social and biological reasons. This literature makes us expect more pragmatism from women, especially mothers. On the other hand, social movement theories represent different demographic factors that impede women's participation in environmental movements, because roles assigned to women cause time constraints to fulfill other commitments.

Materials and Methods

Based on the questions and theoretical literature of the research, the hypotheses are:

- Women are more environmentally active than men.
- Women have a higher rate of environmental activism than men, by controlling the effects of other variables.
- The set of independent variables affecting women's environmental activism are different from the set of independent variables affecting men's environmental activism.

In this paper, activism is seen as a continuous variable from inactivity to sustained activism. Therefore, it is about different levels of activism, not activism or non-activism. There are different types of activism in society. In most social and political science studies, the focus is on high-cost and high-risk activism, but in this article, we focus on low-cost and low-risk actions that members engage in routine activities of NGOs.

The statistical population are members of the environmental NGOs of East Azerbaijan province who at the time of conducting the research were recognized as official members and completed the

membership form. The latest official statistics of the environmental NGOs in East Azerbaijan is for 2019. There were 23 environmental NGOs in East Azerbaijan. Fields of activity of these NGOs are: Education through workshops, seminars and specialized programs, promoting environmental culture among children, students and women

Environmental protection activities such as green space development, nature cleansing, environmental and natural resources surveillance, creation of wildlife sanctuaries in nature and development of natural areas and tree planting

Specialized research programs in the field of environment, such as study and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems and the reintroduction and rehabilitation of endangered animal and plant species, also the complex issue of water in the region of Azerbaijan

Development of ecotourism in the province, entrepreneurship, employment and change of livelihood in order to protect the environment, programs to support farmers with organic and natural products

Pursuing financial and spiritual support to the benefactors of the province in order to implement the above programs.

They have obtained activity license from various government institutions, such as Provincial Government, Governorate, National Youth Organization, Physical Education Organization, Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and Department of Environment. Number of statistical population is 15365; 8050 women and 7315 men. This survey was conducted with a sample size of 375 people by proportional stratified sampling. Sample size is determined by Cochran formula with error of 0.05.

In the statistical model, the impact of gender as an independent variable is measured along with age, income, and education as control variables on activism. Environmental values, association with other actors, frequency of communication, and level of movement identity are also examined. Data were collected through a questionnaire. Part of the questionnaire was self-constructed and the other part was taken from other studies. The measurement of independent variables such as social bond rate, frequency of communication and level of environmental identity has done by the questionnaires related to previous studies.

The average participation of males (27.67%) is higher than of females (27.10%) for total items, but this difference is not significant. Multivariate regression was used to predict activism based on independent variables. Logarithmic conversion has been used to use regression analysis in some variables that were not consistent with regression analysis defaults. Women are no more active environmentally than men with controlling variables such as age, education, duration of membership in NGO, and income. Being a parent of men and women does not have a significant impact on activism. Activism can be better predicted by age and duration of membership in NGO than other variables. In general, younger members with longer membership periods and more ties with other members who experience more communication and those who have a greater level of movement identity are more active than the rest. The lack of a significant relationship between gender and activism may reflect the cross-cutting effects that have been reported in the research literature. Most variables jointly predict male and female activity, and the predicted variance of the dependent variable is almost similar by the independent variables in women (40%) and men (47%). In both men and women, younger people have more connections with other members of the NGOs and are more involved in communicating with environmental issues and have a higher level of shared identity with NGOs, and ultimately more environmental activism than other members.

Discussion of results

Women have more environmental concerns than men without having more environmental participation. How can these findings be reconciled?

Although, these findings appear to be inconsistent, they are consistent with the conceptual model. In

the model, there are enhancing variables (such as environmental values) and limiting variables (such as biographical access) as mediators of the relationship between gender and environmental activism. However, the limitations of environmental activism appear to have little effect on the responsible environmental behaviors that emerge in the context of everyday life. Thus, theoretically, the impact of gender on environmental activism and environmental responsible behavior will not be similar. In fact, the formation of theoretical literature on gender and environmental activism is dual.

There are conflicting pressures for women's activism in the field of the environment, including women's double employment in the domestic and social spheres, which results from the gender division of labor and leads to restrictions on women's activism. To illustrate, it is argued that women may be more environmentally concerned than men, but the scarcity of resources will likely limit their activism. In fact, when women do their housework, they limit their time to participate in environmental activities compared to men. Although the gender division of labor in two domestic and social domains has clear implications for environmental activism, this division of labor operates differently at different times and places.

The question is, based on the results of this study and comparing it with the results of other studies, why do these restrictions prevent women from environmental activism and not from responsible environmental behaviors? According to previous studies, environmental responsible behaviors in women have been reported more than men. Many environmental conservation behaviors are in the realm of homework and day-to-day affairs and behaviors such as buying organic products, disposing of waste, using less harmful detergents for the environment, and using public transportation are mostly done by women.

Conclusion

Finally, the findings and results of this study can be useful to environmental NGOs. Women's organizational membership is a resource that can enhance even the smallest and least important aspects of their environmental behavior. If environmental movements and their NGOs want to change people's daily consumption patterns and tend to take responsibility for environmental issues, focusing on women is probably the most effective strategy. In order to make women more active and more involved in key roles in movements, their responsibility for home and child care should be reduced, otherwise gender-biased effects will continue to lead many women with high environmental concerns, to supportive and insignificant roles in environmental organizations.

We have reviewed evidences that reveal a cultural and social pattern of women's protecting behaviors about their families and environment through household practices. We also described the development of gender theorizing in sociology of work, an area where the gendered division of domestic labor is explained as problematic. Our analysis pointed to the need to critically theorize gender-environment relationships by highlighting different associations between gender and engaging in environmental activism.