

## Unit 8

# PSYCHOLOGY AND LIFE

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#### Introduction

The behaviour of man is generally influenced by his surrounding physical, social, and cultural situations, that is, his environment. In short, the term environment depicts all that surrounds us.

The term environment entails within itself all the matter and energy that lies outside an organism. Man has been interacting with the

environment from the ancient times. Initially for his survival, and later, progress, man has always remained dependent upon environment. Lately, he has started exploiting the environment. As a result, today the man – environment relationship is undergoing a delicate phase. Activities of man have brought about many serious environmental hazards, like, pollution, noise, rise in temperature, unusual rains, excessive cold, etc. Such environmental situations are inappropriate for the physical and mental health of humans. Apart from these, there are some social problems which influence the psychological life of man. Poverty, discrimination, aggression and violence are some of the chief social problems. Mass–communication, which is also a condition of the man–made environment, has a great impact on the behaviour of individuals. In this chapter we shall try to understand the effect of all these environmental situations on the behaviour of individuals. Also, ways and means to control these environmental conditions shall be discussed.

#### Man–Environment Relationship

The relationship between human behaviour and environment plays an important role in our

lives. A branch of psychology, known as environmental psychology studies many such psychological issues which are broadly related to the man–environment interactions.

Environment is basically of two types – natural and built. That part of nature which has not been built by man is called natural environment. Natural environment includes all the creations of nature, like plants, trees, air, temperature etc. and also the changes occurring in them over time. Whatever has been created by man makes up the built environment, for eg., cities, houses, offices, bridges, roads, dams etc.

Many perspectives exist regarding the man–environment relationship. The first perspective, called the minimalist perspective assumes that physical environment has a negligible impact on human behaviour, health and wellbeing. The second perspective is called the instrumental perspective. It proposes that the existence of physical environment is chiefly for the happiness and wellbeing of man. Most of the impact of man on environment reflects this perspective. The third and the most important perspective is spiritual. It refers to environment as a valuable asset. The belief entailed in it is that both, the existence and happiness of man are dependent upon the health of the environment. The chipko movement in India is an example related to this perspective. The more widespread this perspective becomes in society and life, the healthier shall be the environment. At the same time, the human life shall also be prosperous and happy.

### **Effect of environment on human behavior**

Apart from affecting our physical health, environment also affects our psychological

processes and behaviour. On the other hand, human behavior affects environment and this effect generates pressurizing environmental conditions like – noise, pollution, crowd etc. Some of the factors causing environmental pressure are out of man's control. In this section of the chapter we shall discuss about the various environmental situations that affect human behaviour.

### **Noise**

Any sound that is unpleasant and irritating is called noise. On the basis of common experience it is known that long–term noise is painful and produces an unpleasant and unnatural mental state in the individual. Noise not only affects an individual emotionally but also his work performance. If a person stays in noise for a long period of time, he starts showing symptoms of irritation, aggression, lack of concentration, difficulty in sleeping and deterioration in mental health etc. However, it has also been observed that, when a person is forced to stay in noise for long periods of time, he learns to adapt with it. But, how far a person will be able to adapt depends upon a few factors, like the nature of the work, predictability or non–predictability regarding the noise and its controllability (whether or not it can be controlled). If the job to be done is simple or interesting, like addition of small numbers or story reading, then noise does not affect work performance. However, if the work is difficult or noise occurs at uncontrolled intervals, noise deteriorates the quality of work. Noise is an unpleasant environmental condition and controlling it is very important. Noise can be controlled with the help of strict rules.

## **Pollution**

Environmental pollution occurs in the form of air, water and land pollution. The waste material from industries and households is a big source of pollution. Scientists are well aware of the fact that any kind of pollution is dangerous for physical health. Some research studies have also highlighted the direct and indirect psychological influences of the various kinds of pollution.

It should be understood that, generally, any kind of environmental pollution can affect the nervous system. Poisonous chemicals affect psychological processes to a great extent. Pollution also influences the emotional reactions of an individual. Many a times, it brings about laziness leading to deterioration in work performance, lessens interest in the work at hand and also increases levels of anxiety. Such people fail to focus on their work and are unable to stay in happy mood.

Similarly, the presence of dust particles and other suspended particles in air brings about difficulty in breathing and also suffocation, at times, leading to pathologies related to the breathing system. Concentration of chemicals like carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide etc. in the air brings about many health related problems. The presence of such pollutants in the air brings about some specific symptoms in individuals, called the Air Pollution Syndrome (APS). People experience fatigue, headache, irritation, depression, etc. as a result of this syndrome.

Air pollution negatively affects work performance. Many studies show that air pollution deteriorates the working capacity of vehicle drivers. The presence of polluting chemicals in water and on land is dangerous for

physical health. There is a sufficient evidence to show that the presence of poisonous chemicals in air, land and water not only affects general psychological processes but is also the cause for serious mental disorders. Presence of certain chemicals like lead can affect mental growth, leading to mental retardation.

## **Crowd**

The term crowd refers to a psychological state or experience characterized by stress and anxiety and which occurs in an area of high density (people). Thus, crowd is a subjective experience. This experience produces negative feelings that cause stress and are unpleasant. As long as one does not have such an experience in geographical area with a high degree of density (people), it cannot be called a crowd. Crowd is not experienced in melas, social gatherings or amongst spectators who gather to watch some sport. But it is experienced in a shop, in trains or ever small rooms when a lot of people gather there. To experience crowd in an area of high density, it is necessary that there is a social overload for the person, there is interference in the free execution of his activities and the person experiences difficulty in maintaining his privacy.

When social density increases, the person feels that his privacy is being hampered and he is unable to regulate it according to his needs. That is an unpleasant and painful situation. He feels that his dignity is being threatened. If such a state exists for a long period of time, the person may start feeling mentally ill. The encroachment of privacy leads to anger. The effect of crowding on behaviour has been studied extensively and it is clear that crowd affects many aspects of behaviour. The psychological

and physical effects of crowding have been observed in many studies. Crowding is found to increase heart rate and blood pressure. It has a negative effect on interpersonal attraction and also increases aggression in people.

In comparison to simple, complex tasks are found to be more negatively influenced by crowding. In this way, we see that crowding generally has negative impact on people and their behaviour.

### **Natural disasters**

Noise, various kinds of pollution and crowd are such environmental stressors that are the result of human behaviour. On the contrary, natural disasters are such pressurizing experiences which are a result of the imbalance in the natural environment. Some of the common examples of natural disasters are earthquakes, sunami, floods, storm and volcanic eruptions. There are examples of other disasters as well, like – war, industrial accidents (like leakage of poisonous gases and radioactive elements from industries), epidemic, like plaque (1994) that had affected various parts of India. Though war and epidemic are man-made calamities, their impact can be as serious as those of natural calamities. These incidents are called ‘disasters’ because they cannot be stopped. Besides, these conditions come about without any warning and cause a great damage to human life and property.

What are the consequences of natural disasters ? The first and the foremost consequence is that common people get engulfed in poverty. They become homeless and resourceless. All their possessions and property get lost or are destroyed. Secondly, they are shocked as a result of the sudden loss of money, property and loved ones. All these conditions are sufficient to

produce an intense psychological pathology. Natural disasters are traumatic experiences that are emotionally disturbing and shocking for the survivors of those calamities. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a serious psychological problem that occurs as a result of traumatic experiences like natural disasters.

### **Promotion of Environment Friendly Behaviour**

Promotion of environment friendly behaviour includes two kinds of behaviour. Firstly, behaviour with the objective of protecting the environment against hazards and secondly, behaviour to enhance the environment in a healthy manner.

In order to effectively preserve and promote the environment, it is necessary that people of the world understand the true nature and functioning of the environment in its realistic sense and develop a scientific attitude towards the same. Also, they need to give up on their habits of excessive consumption of luxuries and adopt responses keeping in mind the fact that environment also acts and reacts under the influence of their actions and reactions. Some of the following suggestions can be easily brought into practice by the common people. They can play an important role in environmental preservation and improvement by adopting these simple solutions.

- Air pollution can be reduced by keeping vehicles in good condition, by driving fuel free vehicles and by making people give up habits of smoking on a wide scale.
- The intensity, place and time of sound can all be controlled with the help of strict laws.
- Appropriate management of waste can be done. Bio-degradable waste should be

separated from non-biodegradable waste. The waste material from kitchen should be used to produce manure. Proper attention should be given to the management of waste material from industries and hospitals.

- Plantation of trees should be carried out.
- There should be appropriate arrangements for rewards and punishment for people showing environment friendly and appropriate behaviour and inappropriate behaviour respectively.
- Awareness regarding environment preservation should be spread amongst people with the help of various media.

### **Social issues**

Many social problems exist in our society. Unemployment, poverty, castism, discrimination etc. are social problems that affect the human life not only physically, but also, psychologically. The causes, results and means of eradication of these problems shall be discussed in this section of the chapter.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is a curse and the sooner we get rid of it, the better it shall be for our society. Some experts define poverty only in economic terms.

The unfavourable effects of poverty can be seen on motivation, personality, social behaviour, cognitive functions and mental health.

Poor people show low levels of aspiration accompanied by weak achievement motivation. They exhibit a strong need for dependency on others. They evaluate their failures on the basis of their luck and not on the basis of their capabilities and hard work. They generally believe that the situations of their lives are

governed by factors outside of them, and not by factors lying within them.

Poor people have low levels of self-esteem and high levels of anxiety and introversion. They perceive failure as highly uncertain. They live with hopelessness, powerlessness and the consciousness of injustice. They experience a loss of individuality. In the context of social behaviour, the poor class holds revengeful attitude towards the other classes of society.

Sometimes poverty occurs as a result of natural calamities like earthquakes, floods and storms and sometimes because of man-made disasters. When such incidents occur people lose all their valuables and property and become poor overnight. Similarly, when one generation of poor people fails to eradicate poverty, then, the next generation also lives in poverty. Apart from these two, many other factors are responsible for poverty.

Poor people have to not only face low income and lack of resources, but also low levels of nutrition and health, poor education and deficit of skills. Such conditions limit their opportunities to find employment, which in turn again reinforce their status of low income and poor nutrition and health conditions. As a result the levels of their motivation further deteriorate and all this continues in the form of a vicious circle.

Government and many self-help organizations work towards poverty eradication. Poor people should be motivated to become self-reliant. Initially, resources, education, medicine and other facilities should be made available. They should be given employment opportunities

according to the laws of social justice. In this way the poor will be motivated to adopt legal, rather than illegal means to livelihood.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is the behavioural manifestation of prejudice. In discrimination, members of a particular group are treated either positively or negatively because of their membership in a particular group. Thus, prejudice is the basic cause of discrimination. Prejudices may be based on caste, religion, gender, age, economic condition, physical ability, etc. Unfavourable expressions of prejudices may lead to inter-group conflicts. Discrimination is also the progenitor of social injustice. People are deprived of appropriate opportunities for progress despite knowledge, education and ability.

As a result, such people stay mentally under stress. They feel frustrated which often leads to anger and violence. The makers of the Indian constitution framed laws to ensure that no class of society had to suffer at the cost of discrimination. Fundamental rights are the greatest example in this regard. These laws are present from the time of independence, yet our country suffers from the problem of discrimination. Strict compliance to the laws is important to get rid of discrimination.

At the same time, awareness at the social level and attitude change are also important. Discrimination can be reduced by the method of cultural assimilation. In this method, people are made to understand other groups with the objective of encouraging them to give up misleading and illusive beliefs about other groups. Students and people belonging to various schools, universities and institution

should be regularly taught to give up discriminatory behaviour of every kind. The educational mission for adopting feelings and perceptions of equality for all should be continued.

### **Aggression, Violence and Peace**

Aggression is a physical or verbal behaviour, carried out with the objective of hurting others. In many situations of life aggression and violence are generated by direct instructions, like the command to jawars of an army to attack the enemy in a warfield. Such an aggression is important and acceptable. However, what is alarming is the increasing tendency for aggressive behaviour amongst common people. Materialism, competition, greed, stress, jealousy are some reactions and feelings which have become a commonplace thing in today's times. Such reactions may also ultimately culminate in aggression and violence. Bandura is a great social psychologist, who believes that aggression is learnt through observational learning. Models present in the family (parents and others), scenes of aggression and violence shown in movies, television and internet, all act as sources for learning aggressive behaviour.

Dollard and Miller propounded a theory, the Frustration – Aggression Hypothesis. They have considered frustration as the cause of aggression. When the goal-directed behaviour of a person is blocked in the middle, it causes frustration. Many situations in the social context produce frustration in a person and it is this frustration which later gets exhibited in the form of aggression.

Aggressive and violent behavior is dangerous for everyone including the person himself, his family and the community at large. Therefore, it

is very important to control it. The social learning model states that, just as a person learns aggressive behaviour by observing an aggressive model, he can learn to be less aggressive by observing a non-aggressive model. If a person is made to feel empathetic towards others, then too his aggressive behaviour lessons. Punishment is not considered to be an effective technique to control aggression. It is necessary to control poverty and social injustice in order to reduce aggression in the society. Social justice and poverty eradication shall bring down levels of frustration in the society, which in turn shall reduce violence and aggression.

Apart from these treatments, it is important to develop positive attitude towards peace, at the community and societal levels. We not only need to reduce aggression but also need to develop peace and maintain it.

### **Impact of Mass communication on behavior**

In communication, an organism establishes an understanding with another organism. Thus, it can be said that in communication two or more than two organisms or people exchange information and experiences amongst themselves. In other words, the process of communicating one's thoughts, ideas and feelings to others by means of language or symbols and signals is known as communication. Many people are involved in mass-communication and it involves the usage of such media like radio, television, newspapers, cinema etc. Such a communication is a one-way communication.

The new media of mass communication like mobile, internet etc are very much in vogue now. In this era of information technology,

information is released and received at high speed in attractive forms, via a number of different media. As the information and programmes are presented in very attractive forms, people like to spend a lot of time in watching and listening to them. A lot of research has been done to explore the effect of mass communication on behavior. Some of the researches done on television show that children spend a lot of time on watching T.V. As a result their habits of studying and playing deteriorate, they have difficulty in concentrating, their creativity reduces and ability to comprehend weakens. Also, their social interactions are negatively influenced. Mobile and internet have brought forth such information which attracts children and youth to go astray. Some of the programmes being shown on television can increase the tendency for aggression and may also produce unfavourable impact on the language of children. Thus, it is important to control what and how it is being shown through the media of mass communication.

### **Important points**

- Undesirable human activities have transformed the state of environment, because of which problems like pollution, noise, crowd etc. have emerged.
- Pollution has an unfavourable impact on our mental and physical health as well as on psychological processes.
- Noise also has a negative impact on our thinking, memory and learning. Intensively loud levels of sound can permanently damage our ability to hear and can also increase heartrate, blood pressure and muscular tension.

- Crowd is the psychological experience of not having enough space. Crowding has a negative impact on cognitive functioning, interpersonal relationships and mental and physical health.
- A natural disaster interrupts the normal life of a society by causing damage, destruction and human suffering. The victims of disaster may be helped through counseling and also by providing opportunities to carry out group activities.
- Promotion of environment friendly behaviour promotion includes two types of behaviour. Firstly, behaviour directed towards protection of environment against problems. Secondly, behaviour that plays a role in improving the healthy status of the environment.
- Aggression and violence are one of the chief problems of the modern society. Reducing poverty and discrimination can bring down levels of aggression in the society.
- Mass - communication is an influential phenomenon. Many unfavourable influences of mass - communication occur on human life.

## Practise Questions

### Multiple Choice Questions

- (1) The term used to describe all that is around us is
  - (a) Pollution
  - (b) Environment
  - (c) Noise
  - (d) Family
- (2) Environment is mainly of two types natural and
  - (a) Instrumental
  - (b) Humanistic
  - (c) Inter-personal
  - (d) Built
- (3) This perspective refers to environment as a valuable object.
  - (a) Minimalist
  - (b) Operational
  - (c) Materialistic
  - (d) Spiritual
- (4) Any sound that produces irritation and is unpleasant is called.
  - (a) Noise
  - (b) Shreak
  - (c) Pollution
  - (d) Shouting
- (5) Those behaviour whose objective is environmental preservation and its better health is called.
  - (a) Friendship
  - (b) Awareness
  - (c) Environment love
  - (d) Promotion of environment friendly behavior
- (6) A physical or verbal behaviour with the objective of hurting others
  - (a) Crime
  - (b) Hatred
  - (c) Aggression
  - (d) Feud

### **Short Answer Questions –**

- (1) What do you understand by environment?
- (2) What is mass -communication ?
- (3) What is discrimination ?
- (4) Explain the nature of aggression.
- (5) What are the main causes of pollution ?
- (6) What is crowd ?

### **Long Answer questions –**

- (1) Explain the man – environment relationship. How can it be made healthy ?
- (2) What is the effect of mass communication on human behavior?
- (3) How do natural disasters affect life?
- (4) How can poverty and discrimination be reduced ?
- (5) Enlist some of the important points of Promotion of environment – friendly behavior.

### **Answers of Multiple Choice Questions**

- (1) b (2) d (3) d  
(4) a (5) d (6) c