

# Environmental Awareness and Individual's Altruism

Subjects: **Psychology**, **Social** | **Environmental Sciences** | **Sociology**

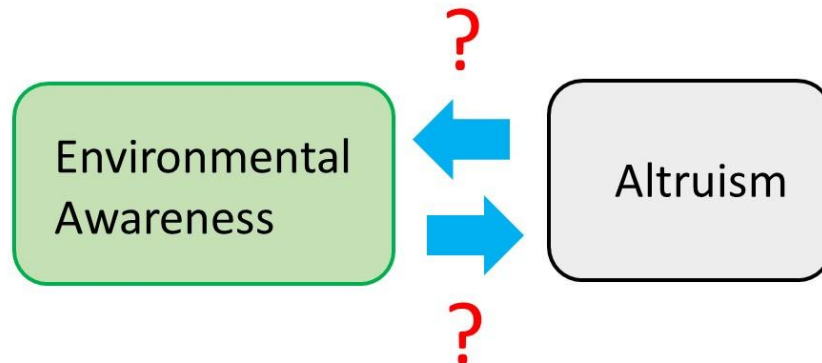
Contributor: Kentaka Aruga

Environmental awareness is the level of how much people are interested in or care about environmental issues. Environmental awareness can be either local or global one depending on the type of environmental problem. Studies have argued that this awareness tends to be related to an individual's altruism, which is one's action that benefits others without expecting some kind of external reward. The connection between environmental awareness and altruism is getting attention from scholars since both concepts are prosocial ones but it is uncertain if people who are highly aware of environmental issues may not be always acting altruistically. However, it is likely that altruistic people are more likely to have high environmental awareness.

altruism

environmental awareness

self-report altruism scale



Global environmental issues, especially climate change and rainforest destruction, are wreaking havoc on the natural environment. It is suggested that such environmental degradation and ecological collapse are caused by increased economic activities. To reduce anthropogenic pressure on the environment, every individual must recognize how their economic activities impact the environment and to consider living in an environmentally friendly way.

Studies suggest that people who are more concerned or aware of environmental issues are more likely to reduce their effects on the environment. Thus, an individual's environmental awareness is an important factor in shifting

people toward less environmentally damaging economic activities. Enhancing levels of environmental awareness will contribute to mitigating the effects of human activities on the environment. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly crucial to identify the factors that increase environmental awareness.

Recently, studies have revealed that altruism or altruistic motivation has a significant effect on increasing the individual's environmental awareness level when a simple Likert scale is used to measure environmental awareness. Furthermore, many studies use Likert-type scales to evaluate an individual's environmental awareness level, but these studies do not test or mention whether a simple Likert-type environmental awareness index can capture altruism as measured by a psychometric altruism index: an index used in psychology to identify an individual's altruism level through compounding various items reflecting an individual's altruistic actions. To date, no studies have quantitatively analyzed how the Likert-type environmental awareness index is related to altruism measured with a psychometric index or how the environmental awareness index can capture factors that are linked to the psychometric altruism index.

Hence, the objective of this study is to determine how suitable the Likert-type environmental awareness index is for predicting an individual's altruism level. The study expects that if the environmental awareness index has a bidirectional relationship with the altruism index and is affected similarly from attributes (demographical characteristics, degree of political and social awareness, attitudes toward donation) that have potential impacts on the altruism index, the environmental awareness index can become a predictor for the altruism index.

There are several reasons why it is essential to conduct a study to validate the use of the Likert-type environmental awareness index for predicting an individual's altruism level. First, people who are concerned about environmental issues are not necessarily altruistic; some people worry about environmental problems on behalf of themselves. It could be that these people care about environmental issues only to prevent their quality of life from deteriorating. It could be that they are not worried about the people in future generations or the suffering of other people from environmental degradation but are simply anxious about the environmental problems they might face, such as the pollution of their drinking water and forest fires in their vicinity. Second, there could be a gap between high environmental awareness and actual environmental attitudes or actions. For example, people with high knowledge of environmental issues do not necessarily drive less, use less electricity to reduce their environmental footprint, or participate in environmental activities. Thus, to use the environmental awareness indices to predict an individual's altruism level, we need to verify whether such indices truly reflect an individual's altruism level. Third, if it becomes apparent that a simple Likert-type environmental awareness index can be used to predict an individual's altruism level, we can reduce the efforts to create a special and complex environmental awareness index for measuring an individual's altruism level. There is no generally accepted definition for environmental awareness, and the way environmental awareness is measured often varies among different disciplines. Hence, if our study reveals that a simple Likert-type environmental awareness index is sufficient for predicting an individual's altruism level, it will help researchers to reduce the time and effort they would spend developing new indices for examining the relationship between altruism and environmental awareness.

Studies measuring altruism often use either a self-reported type or a dictator game experiment, but this study applies the self-report altruism scale (SRAS) developed by Rushton et al<sup>[1]</sup>. The first reason for using this SRAS index for measuring altruism is because since the Likert-type environmental awareness index is obtained from self-reported answers of the survey respondents, it is reasonable to use an altruism index that is gathered in a self-reported way as to compare with the environmental awareness index. The second reason for using the SRAS in this study is because the dictator game model often fails to measure altruism due to experimental demand effects while the psychometric SRAS index is more broadly applied in various fields for measuring individual's altruism levels. The third reason is that the SRAS index is based on not one type of altruistic action but is a composite of actual altruistic actions taken by the individuals. Hence, this index reflects the actual altruistic behavior taken rather than measuring an individual's awareness of altruism.

Although there are various definitions of altruism, this study defines altruism as one's action that benefits others without expecting some kind of external reward. The SRAS is an index that at least captures such altruistic action while environmental awareness is only an individual's awareness that is often assumed to be related to altruism because people with high environmental awareness are more likely to be prosocial, and prosocial individuals tend to take altruistic action. By investigating the connection between environmental awareness and SRAS indices, Aruga<sup>[2]</sup> verifies whether an individual's altruistic awareness is linked with his or her altruistic action.

According to Aruga<sup>[2]</sup> environmental awareness does predict altruism and also people who are altruistic tend to have high levels of environmental awareness. Furthermore, this study reveals that compared with the global environmental awareness index, the local environmental awareness index was more similar to the SRAS index and had a higher average marginal effect on the SRAS. This may be because the items on the SRAS are based on local situations rather than global ones, suggesting that the items on the SRAS need to be revised to incorporate items that can capture altruistic behaviors that go beyond the local community. This study was based on Japanese survey respondents so further study is necessary to find out if such environmental awareness and altruism relationships sustain among people in different countries.

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## References

1. J Philippe Rushton; The altruistic personality and the self-report altruism scale. *Personality and Individual Differences* **1983**, 4, 293-302, 10.1016/0191-8869(81)90063-5.
2. Kentaka Aruga; Is Environmental Awareness a Good Predictor of an Individual's Altruism Level?. *Sustainability* **2020**, 12, 7929, 10.3390/su12197929.

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