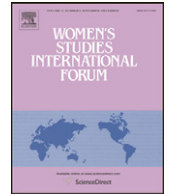


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Gender, responsible citizenship and global climate change

Sadeqh Salehi ^a, Zahra Pazuki Nejad ^b, Hossein Mahmoudi ^{c,d,*}, Andrea Knierim ^{c,e}^a Department of Social Sciences, Mazandaran University, Iran^b Postgraduate Youth Studies, Mazandaran University, Iran^c Department of Rural Sociology, Institute of Social Sciences in Agriculture, University of Hohenheim, Germany^d Environmental Sciences Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran^e Institute of Socio-Economics, Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Germany

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SYNOPSIS

Public participation in climate change policy requires a clear understanding of the issues. This is essential if an informed society is to achieve the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Women, due to the type of activities they perform in the household, may have a prominent and leading role in this sphere and thus constitute a group holding great potential to support policies to deal with adaptation to climate change. The purpose of the present study is to assess gender-related awareness of climate change issues and the engagement of citizens in climate change mitigation based on eco-feminism theory to the socio-cultural features of citizen households in Iran. To this end, 310 residents of Quemshahr in Mazandaran province (Iran) were selected with a random sampling method. The results show that while women's behavioral engagement in tackling climate change is high, men exhibit a high level of cognitive dimension of engagement in tackling climate change. Furthermore, the results show that the level of citizens' engagement varies by education and age. Based on the research findings, activities to promote environmental education and understanding of climate change mitigation policies are proposed to increase the level of knowledge of the target group.

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Introduction

Climate change is the most expansive global environmental problem facing humanity. It is characterized by economic growth, industrial capitalism, technological development and material prosperity (McCright, 2010). Climate change is not only a technical problem but also there are various social aspects to this issue including gender-specific aspects (Dankelman, 2002). As such, climate change is a theoretically and empirically significant case for examining gender dynamics (McCright, 2010). Thus, the risk of climatic change is not gender-neutral (Habtezion, 2013; IPCC, 2014) and gender dimensions of climate change need to be considered. Gender here is not just an empirical category (i.e., men/women); it is also a discursive

construction that shapes social life (McGregor, 2010). Climate change can be influenced by human behaviors. Considering the different roles and responsibilities of men and women, varying according to specific cultural features within societies, climate change has gender-specific characteristics. "Women are affected differently, and more severely, by climate change and natural disasters because of social roles discrimination, poverty and intra household inequity" (Parikh, 2007: 7).

Studies on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies need to address women and men explicitly in order to gain a better understanding of the specific ways in which they respond to climate change issues. In fact, women should be addressed in such studies not only because they are the most vulnerable but also because they have different perspectives and expertise to contribute (Parikh, 2007). To deliver special governmental programs tackling climate change, resources and investment are required that governments alone cannot

* Corresponding author at: Im chaussefeld 1-70599, Stuttgart, Germany.

provide. Therefore, citizens' participation in the mitigation and adaptation to climate change is desirable (Giddens, 2009). This presumes a synthesis of socio-cultural with economic-political approaches (Shahnushi, Mazhari, KaksarAstane, & Rasolzade, 2012). In the Agenda 21 document (United Nations, 1992), women were noted as a major group in achieving sustainable development. In this agenda, there is an emphasis on empowerment, participation and equality for women as bases for peace and sustainable development (Pazuki Nejad, 2012). Sociological findings related to demographic groups that are more vulnerable to global climate change provide good information for human development scenarios (Nagel, Dietz, & Broadbent, 2010). As women and men can complement their efforts about climate change adaptation and mitigation, understanding their comparative advantages can be useful (Denton, 2002).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between men's and women's level of engagement in tackling climate change. An overview of recent studies indicates that the degree of responsibility and engagement with climate change varies according to demographic variables. Shwom, Bidwell, Dan, and Dietz (2010), for example, assess the engagement of citizens in mitigating climate change. Their results showed that people's engagement with mitigation policies is low and the amount of support differs by age, gender and education. Agho, Stevens, and Taylor (2010) found, in a survey conducted in Australia, that due to the detailed information provided by scientists and media about climate change people change their lifestyles and habits. They reported, "Females and respondents with a University degree were significantly more likely to have changed their way of living than males and those without University degree." Scannell and Gifford (2013) found that there are differences in responsibility towards climate change by gender. They found that women had higher levels of engagement in tackling climate change than men. Sutton and Tobin (2011) assessed the objective and subjective barriers to behavioral engagement in mitigation policies. Their results showed that demographic variables (such as age, gender and education) influenced the probability that the respondents would experience specific constraints on engagement. For example, younger individuals were more likely than older individuals and females were more likely than men to engage in climate change reduction and mitigation. Similarly, McCright (2010) found that younger adults are more engaged with climate change. Whitmarsh, Seyfang, and O'Neill (2011) found that there were limitations in decision making (knowledge, skills, motivation and judgment), individual behavior and civic engagement in climate change and carbon reduction; for instance, although 90% of people knew that planes and cars produce carbon, only 36% were willing to abstain from using them. McCright (2010) reported that women reveal more accurate climate change knowledge than do men. However, women underestimate their climate change knowledge more than men.

According to the above-mentioned literature, the level of climate change engagement varies with demographic characteristics because "individuals' position within the social structure can influence level of access to information, environmental attitudes, and opportunities for engagement" (Sutton & Tobin, 2011). In the present study, we consider differences in

engagement in tackling climate change by demographic variables like gender, education and age.

Theoretical framework

There are various sociological theories (e.g., new environmental paradigm) about why and how people change their behavior in relation to the environment (Salehi, 2009). Specifically, there is a valuable array of sociological perspectives and theories to bring to the study of global climate change (Nagel et al., 2010). Among them, eco-feminism is a gender-related theory that can help to understand the relationship of women with nature.

Some feminists argue that ecology is a special feministic issue that can be called "eco-feminism." With regard to women and climate change, here we use eco-feminism theory which explains the differences between men's and women's experience and knowledge with regard to their environment (Nightingale, 2006).

By the late 1970s and 1980s, an eco-feminism emerged that was influenced by environmental issues and arguments. Eco-feminism comprises a diverse body of ideas and practices which include social and cultural aspects (Sutton, 2007). "Eco-feminism has been coined in France in 1974 by Francoise d'Eaubonne who reiterated the point made by Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s, that women have a particular affinity with the 'natural world' due to their common exploitation by men" (Mellor, 1992 in Cudworth, 2003:55). One notable aspect of the eco-feminist approach is the supposition that women have a special or "essential" relationship to nature which may give them a unique knowledge of the natural environment. This is the eco-centric dimension leading to specific suggestions for renewing our relationships with nature, a dimension which is missing from all the other theories and concepts proposed so far (Curry, 2011). Indeed, eco-feminism is based on the concept that women are especially close to nature in a spiritual or conceptual sense (Leach, 2007). There are two strands of eco-feminist theory: social eco-feminism and affinity eco-feminism (Davion, 1994:8). "Affinity" approaches stress the ways social gender roles enable women to have more empathy with "nature." Social eco-feminism takes account of the ways human domination of nature interlinks with social dominations based on "gender", race, class and other forms of social exclusion (Cudworth, 2003:64). It seeks to find ways to extend and strengthen generally ways of perceiving, valuing and treating the natural world that have long been characterized as feminine, without subscribing to an essentialist determinism which would deny men the ability to change their ways or share in such a process. As a key part of that, women's experience and insights can be appreciated as special and important without being therefore morally superior (Curry, 2011). Resurrección (2013) argued that discourse of climate change vulnerability has confirmed to be a strategic entry point for feminist advocacy. Considering this storyline that women being most vulnerable to climate change impacts, the ecofeminists focused on women's role as natural resource managers.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the eco-feminism perspective. According to that perspective, it is hypothesized here that Iranian women are playing a more

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