

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Lavelle &amp; Fahy, 2012

The ConsEnSus (Consumption, Environment and Sustainability) Project is a four-year research project involving collaboration between TCD and NUI, Galway. The ConsEnSus Project is funded by the EPA under the STRIVE programme. This project focuses on four key areas of household consumption: transport, energy, water and food.

As part of the ConsEnSus Project, the Lifestyle Survey was conducted over a ten-month period between June 2010 and April 2011. The aim of this Lifestyle Survey was to gain an understanding of people's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and sustainable lifestyles. A total of 1,500 households (750 urban based/750 rural based) were surveyed in 30 EDs across Galway City and County Council areas, Derry City Council area, Limavady District Council area, Dublin City Council area and Fingal County Council area.

Further information is available at: [www.consensus.ie](http://www.consensus.ie)



## Environmental Concern

Numerous studies have indicated high levels of environmental concern, as well as growing social awareness of environment degradation across the island of Ireland (Drury, 2000; 2003; Davies et al., 2005). However, environmental concerns and attitudes are often not the sole motivating factors why people engage in certain behaviours. Attitudes towards perceived moral obligation, perceived entitlement to resources as well as behavioural experience can all influence a person's behaviour; either directly or indirectly. Similarly, perceived self efficacy can influence an individual's behaviour.

## Level of environmental concern

When respondents were asked how concerned they were about environmental issues:

- Approximately 86% stated that they were either 'very concerned' or 'somewhat concerned' (n=1,289) (see Figure 2.1).
- More female respondents (27%, n=240) reported being 'very concerned' in comparison to male respondents (17%, n=108).
- Levels of environmental concern were slightly higher among respondents who had attained third level education (89%), in comparison to respondents who had completed their education at the primary level (82%) or secondary level (83%).
- Similar levels of environmental concern were recorded across all age cohorts; with marginally higher levels of concern noted amongst respondents in the 50-65 age category (88%) and also in the 65-79 age group (88%), in comparison to respondents in the younger 18-33 age categories (83%).

## Environmental responsibility

- Over half of the respondents (58%, n=871) felt that they needed 'to behave in a more environmentally friendly way'.
- More female respondents (61%, n=537) in comparison to their

male counterparts (54%, n=334), believed that they needed 'to behave in a more environmentally friendly way'.

- Respondents in the younger age cohorts, in comparison to those in the older age categories, were more likely to feel that they should 'behave in a more environmentally friendly way'; with 59% in the 18-34 years age group believing they should behave in this way, in comparison to 41% in the 65-79 year group and 38% in the 80 years and older age category.

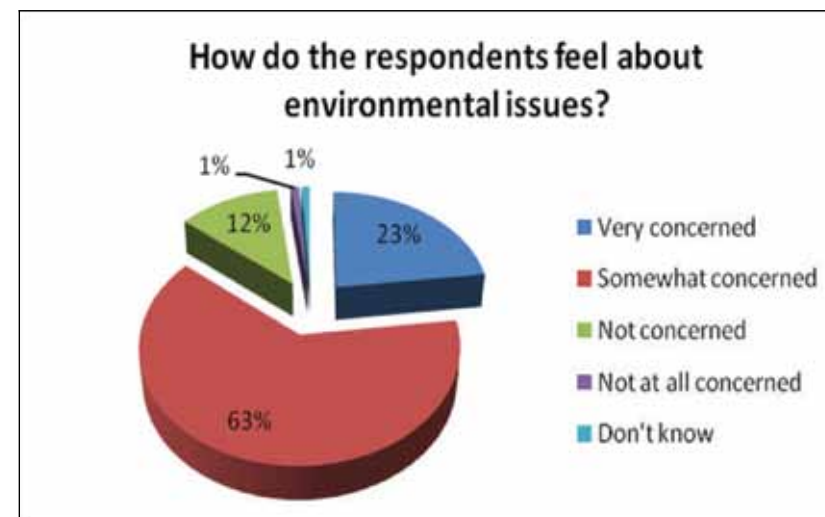


Figure 2.1: Level of environmental concern

## Self efficacy

- Overall 82% of the sample (n=1,129) believed that their personal behaviour could make a difference in the environment.
- More women (85%) in comparison to men (77%) believed that their own personal behaviour could make a difference in the environment.
- A greater number of the respondents who had completed third level education (84%), in comparison to respondents who had completed their education at either primary level (76%)

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or secondary level (80%), believed that their personal behaviour could make a difference in the environment.

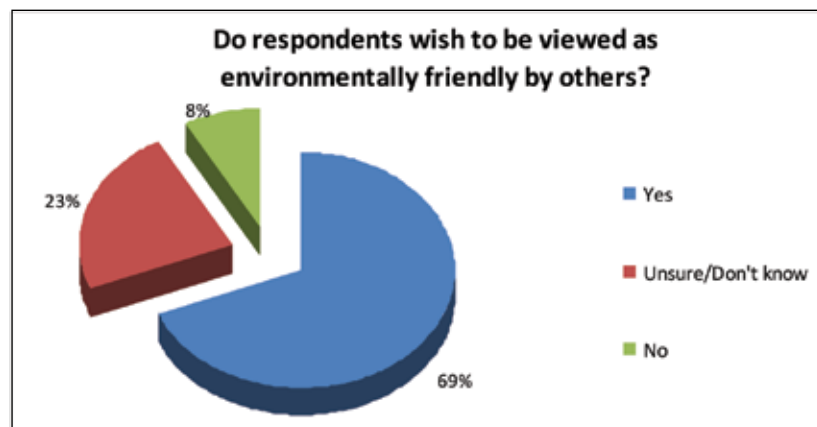


Figure 2 2: Social desirability levels amongst respondents

### Social desirability

- Over two thirds of all respondents (69%, n=1,028) stated that they liked to be perceived as 'environmentally friendly'.
- More female respondents (73%), in comparison to their male counterparts (62%), wished to be viewed as being 'environmentally friendly'.
- More respondents in the third level education grouping (73%, n=591), in comparison to those in the secondary level education group (64%, n=394) and the primary education group (58%, n=38), wished to be perceived as 'environmentally friendly'.
- In the Republic, respondents in the higher income categories (greater than €38,000 per household p.a.), in comparison to respondents in the lower income categories (less than €37,999 per household p.a.), were more likely to want others to perceive them as being 'environmentally friendly'.
- Conversely in the Northern Ireland sample, respondents across all income categories, high and low, were just as likely to want others to perceive them as 'environmentally friendly'.

### Implications

This study found encouragingly high levels of reported environmental concern (86%). Furthermore, high levels of reported environmental responsibility (58%) and self efficacy (82%) were also evident in the results from this study. These are promising findings as it is well documented that environmental concern and personal attitudes do play a key role in influencing environmental behaviours. However, other studies (Barr, 2008; Davies et al., 2005) have shown that although these factors are important, they are often not the sole factors influencing whether or not an individual behaves in an environmental friendly manner. Pro-environmental behaviour is also determined by the complex interplay of many other factors, such as issues of time, convenience and comfort. A number of other structural and societal influences can also impede or impel a sustainable lifestyle choice occurring. In this study, a number of clear gender divisions appeared to be evident. Similarly, a number of reported differences were noted across the various education groupings. Further research is required to explore these issues, especially in an Irish context. Hence, with regard to future environmental policies a more tailored approach may be required to facilitate increased, meaningful behavioral change.

### References

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