

# Pro-environmental programs should take the factors that motivate each gender into consideration

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The researcher Azucena Vicente in the one of the University of the Basque Country's campuses. Credit: UPV/EHU

A piece of research carried out by lecturers at the UPV/EHU's Faculty of Economics and Business has explored the gender differences in pro-environmental behaviors of university students on the UPV/EHU's Bizkaia campus. The results suggest that the set of variables affecting pro-environmental behavior differs according to gender, but that the degree of intensity that each factor exerts on this behavior also differs.

The aim of the study is to increase the effectiveness of university and government interventions and policies in favor of the environment. "We thought it would be interesting to study the university community, because [students] are the ones who will be leading the future, apart from being a reference for other communities," said Azucena Vicente-Molina, the department's head and a co-author of the work.

The pro-environmental behavior analyzed includes daily activities (use of public transport for environmental reasons) and others traditionally related to the domestic sphere (pro-environmental purchasing and recycling). On the basis of a sample of 1,089 students drawn from all the UPV/EHU's centres on the Bizkaia campus (quota samplings), the [gender](#) effect was analyzed through its influence on a range of variables that seem to determine pro-environmental behavior. The variables were pro-environmental attitude, motivation (altruist or selfish), the individual's perception regarding the effectiveness of his/her pro-environmental behavior, and knowledge pertaining to environmental matters, differentiating between objective knowledge (what a person knows about the subject) and subjective knowledge (what a person thinks they know), and the type of course they are on (sciences, engineering and social sciences).

The information was analyzed bearing in mind the sample as a whole and as two groups in terms of gender. The overall analysis concluded that "it is the altruist motivations and environmental knowledge believed to be held that are the factors exerting the greatest influence on the pro-

environmental behavior of the students as a whole." Vicente-Molina warns that "given the fact that the results indicate that the level of objective knowledge of the university community is lower than the level of subjective knowledge, they may well be making incorrect decisions with respect to environmental protection." She added that "this risk is greater in the case of girls, because they are more inclined to developing pro-environmental behavior, but especially because their actual level of knowledge on these matters is lower than that of the boys."

Yet the comparison of the results divided by gender suggests that the variables as a whole affecting pro-environmental behavior vary in terms of gender, and that the level of intensity that each factor exerts on this behavior is also different. "Motivation, subjective knowledge and perceived effectiveness affect both genders, but they have less weight in the boys than in the girls. Yet objective [knowledge](#) is a factor that determines the pro-environmental behavior of the female group but not the male group and yet the factor that exerts the greatest influence on them, i.e. attitude, does not affect the girls," explains Azucena Vicente.

These results have practical implications for future education programs, and will allow the pro-environmental behavior of the university community "as future decision-makers and references for other communities, which they are, to be better understood," she said. "Yet if such programs are to be effective, they will need to stress the characteristics and factors that exert the most influence on the pro-environmental [behavior](#) of each gender."

**More information:** M.A. Vicente-Molina et al, Does gender make a difference in pro-environmental behavior? The case of the Basque Country University students, *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.079](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.079)

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