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## Women's Perceptions and Roles in Environmental Preservation: A Phenomenological Study in Cirebon-Indonesia

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### Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of the community, with a specific focus on women, regarding their roles in environmental preservation in Cikeduk Village-Cirebon. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing a phenomenological approach to delve deeply into the lived experiences and perceptions of women in this context. Data were collected through a combination of interviews, documentation, and direct observations within the village. To ensure the validity of the findings, the study implemented source and technique triangulation, while data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The study's findings revealed a dichotomy in perceptions concerning women's roles in environmental preservation. On one hand, positive perceptions highlight the belief that maintaining sanitation and greenery is not only a significant responsibility for ensuring community well-being and comfort but also provides economic benefits, particularly through activities like tree planting. On the other hand, negative perceptions are characterized by the belief that cleanliness is not a personal responsibility and is not a priority for many individuals. The study identified three key roles that women play in environmental management in Cikeduk: environmental education, reforestation efforts, and the management of domestic waste. These roles are crucial in shaping the village's approach to sustainability. Based on these findings, the study recommends enhancing environmental education from an early age to foster an environmentally conscious generation. It also suggests expanding women's empowerment programs, particularly in environmental management, and addressing negative perceptions through targeted socialization efforts. These recommendations align with the ecofeminist perspective, which emphasizes the critical role of women as agents of change in environmental preservation.

**Keywords:** *Environmental Preservation, Women's Roles, Ecofeminism, Environmental Education, Reforestation*

### A. Introduction

Today, the discussion regarding women and the environment has evolved into a worldwide phenomenon. Ecological and feminist concerns are the subject of discussion in numerous countries. Both are the subject of discussion in the natural sciences and the social sciences. Social issues are inextricably linked to environmental issues from an ecological perspective. In which ecological issues are one of the causes of social concerns, and vice versa. Social issues are the catalysts for ecological issues. Bookchin, a social theorist, contends that all contemporary ecological issues are the result of deeply rooted social issues (Bookchin, 2018). The incorrect perception of the universe by humans is the root cause of the environmental crisis of the modern

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era. Nature is no longer perceived as an entity with intrinsic value; rather, it is evaluated solely on the basis of its instruments or utility value (Febriyani, 2017).

Ecofeminism is a term that refers to the diverse ethical perspectives on the environment that have emerged as a result of the ongoing development of the relationship between humans and the environment. In opposition to the subjugation of women and nature, ecofeminism is a feminist activist movement. Francoise d'Eaubonne introduced ecofeminism in 1974 with the publication of her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death). This work is a social movement and thought that connects ecological issues with women (Tong, 2018). The daily activities of women also reveal their relationship with the environment. Women are acquainted with products that contribute to environmental pollution and debris. For example, the use of chemical drugs for both food and health, the impact of cosmetics and their waste, the use of household waste, the use of fashion products, including supplements for body language to create a slim body, and diet drugs, among others. Consequently, women play a critical and strategic role in environmental management (Astuti, 2012). The significance of women's knowledge and role in environmental management is attributed to the psychological, cultural, and nurture-related characteristics that are associated with them. In every society, there will always be labeling traits (stereotyping) associated with men and women that are socially and culturally constructed. This in turn influences the representation of men and women, which in turn affects their roles (Iswary & Hum, 2010).

Community activities in Cikeduk Village, Cirebon Regency, demonstrate the significance of women in environmental management. The researchers' initial observation data provided a critical understanding of the environment's condition and the role of women in its management. Women are frequently responsible for the care of residences and families, which means that they are directly impacted by environmental pollution that is the result of the behavior of the surrounding community. The necessity of women's involvement in environmental management is underscored by the quantity of domestic garbage, plastic waste, and waste that is dispersed in irrigation streams and rivers. This can result in soil and water pollution, which will ultimately affect the health of women who serve as housekeepers. Furthermore, the practice of burning refuse in the vicinity of the streets results in severe health issues for the community, particularly women and children. This demonstrates the critical importance of an approach that involves women in environmental management initiatives. The focal points that researchers identified as a result of the community's lack of understanding of the negative impacts of dumping waste into the river, social norms that consider it normal, lack of infrastructure, and lack of awareness of the future of future generations are all relevant factors that can be used as a foundation for the development of effective intervention strategies and environmental education. Significant positive changes in the preservation of environmental sustainability for future generations are anticipated as a result of the increased awareness and involvement of women in environmental management.

Previous research has examined the perception and function of women in environmental management. Hermawan (2015) conducted research on the correlation between education level and perception with the behavior of caregivers in maintaining environmental hygiene. This research demonstrates that the behavior of housewives in sustaining environmental cleanliness is positively correlated with their level of education and perception. Consequently, the researcher investigates the research gaps, which are the factors that underlie the perception and behavior of women in environmental management, including economic benefits, access to sanitation, and aspects of environmental awareness.

Next, Silvia Dwi Kartika's research (2023) on the role of ecofeminism for women in the practice of recycling refuse for the community. The findings indicated that women are at the forefront of the effort to comprehend the significance of environmental preservation and refuse

management. They are engaged in waste collection, sifting, processing, and education, all of which are critical components of environmental sustainability. Therefore, the novelty of this research is the fact that the role of women in environmental management is not limited to refuse management, but also encompasses environmental education and greening. The perception and role of women in environmental management, particularly in Cikeduk village, Depok sub-district, Cirebon district, necessitate further investigation in light of this phenomenon. This is demonstrated by the fact that women are frequently directly impacted by environmental pollution that is the result of community behavior, such as the indiscriminate disposal and burning of garbage and the cutting down of trees. Consequently, it is crucial to increase their awareness and involvement in environmental management in order to effect positive change.

Peter L. Berger's social construction theory can be employed to accomplish the objective of this paper. This theory can be employed to comprehend the formation and development of women's attitudes and perceptions regarding the environment. This theory underscores the fact that social reality, which encompasses the comprehension of women's roles and responsibilities, is established through co-construction, interactions, and social processes within society. This research can delve further into the ways in which women's perceptions of their role in environmental protection are influenced by existing social constructions, in addition to personal experiences, by employing social construction theory. It can also assist in elucidating the differences in perceptions and attitudes among women from various social and cultural contexts, as well as the ways in which changes in social construction can encourage positive changes in women's environmental behavior.

## **B. Methods**

The research employed in this study is qualitative and phenomenological in nature. The investigation was conducted in Cikeduk Village, Depok Sub-district, Cirebon Regency. The interactive model from Huberman and Saldana (Miles et al., 2014), was employed to conduct data analysis in this study. This model employs four (4) stages in the analysis of data, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verifications.

The informant selection technique employed in this investigation is Purposive Sampling. Purposive sampling is a data source sampling technique that is subject to specific limitations (Sugiyono, 2013). The selection is made by selecting individuals who are considered to possess the most knowledge about the research topic and meet the criteria. The selection of informants in this study is based on individuals who are deemed capable of providing comprehensive information and are relevant to the research. This ensures that the data obtained can be accurately identified. The informants in this investigation were categorized as main informants and supporting informants. The study included a total of 14 primary informants, with 12 women and 2 males forming each group. The primary informants are chosen based on a variety of factors, including their level of education, the nature of their profession, and their involvement in environmental management. In order to provide a counterbalance and complement to the information and data that researchers acquired from the primary informants, supporting informants were chosen from representatives of the village and local governments. Documentation, in-depth interviews, and observation comprise the data collection methodologies employed in this investigation. The validity of the data was evaluated in this study through the use of triangulation techniques. Source triangulation and technique triangulation were implemented in this investigation.

## **C. Findings and Discussion**

### **1. Environmental Management as Perceived by Women**

Perception is the process of comprehending and assigning significance to the information that an individual acquires as a result of perceiving an object or event. Perception can also be defined as a supposition that is derived from an individual's experience and knowledge. Consequently, there may be discrepancies between the perceptions of two individuals. The informants' perceptions of environmental management in this study can be observed through their opinions or comprehension of various environmental topics, including environment sanitation and greening. Is it crucial for human survival to maintain environmental cleanliness, and was the environment (nature) created to accommodate human requirements, or do humans and nature each have the right to grow and develop? The results of the interviews conducted by the researchers will be used to analyze this.

In the context of ecofeminism research in Cikeduk village, Depok district, Cirebon, this study provides data on the perspectives of women regarding environmental management. Findings regarding women's perspectives regarding environmental management were previously examined by researchers. The perception is inextricably linked to the individual's perspective, resulting in both positive and negative perceptions during its execution. In this investigation, individuals who prioritize cleanliness are inclined to conduct daily cleaning tasks, maintain a clean and organized environment, and independently sort refuse. Conversely, individuals who regard sanitation as mundane and unimportant are inclined to rely on cleaning personnel and exhibit littering behavior.

The initial discovery is that the manner in which women perceive the significance of environmental sustainability and hygiene significantly impacts their actions and attitudes toward the environment. Individuals who prioritize cleanliness conduct daily cleaning tasks, maintain a clean and orderly environment, and sort organic and non-organic refuse. They regard the preservation of cleanliness as an obligation that must be fulfilled, as they will experience a sense of well-being and comfort in a spotless environment. While the perception of the significance of greening is characterized by the implementation of activities such as the planting of trees, the establishment of live pharmacies, and the cultivation of vegetables such as jalapenos. These activities are predicated on their belief that greening is crucial, as they experience numerous advantages, including the ability to avoid the direct heat of the sun, as well as the economic benefits of planting trees that produce fruits and foliage.

The findings of this investigation demonstrate that environmental behavior and activities can be influenced by positive perceptions. This is consistent with the findings of Vevtisia and Pranoto's (2020) research, which indicates that perception is associated with behavior. Additionally, Hermawan's (2015) research indicates that there is a positive correlation between housewives' perceptions of environmental cleanliness and their efforts to maintain it. This is also consistent with Peter L. Berger's social construction theory (Berger, 1990) which posits that social reality is established through the processes of objectivation, internalization, and externalization. In the context of hygiene, individuals' perceptions of the significance of sanitation are the outcome of a social construction process that influences their behavior. This research substantiates the notion that the community's waste management practices are influenced by their perception of hygiene, which is established through the social construction process. Low perceptions result in a reliance on cleaning staff and littering behavior, while positive perceptions promote more responsible behavior.

The behavior and activities of women in relation to the environment are significantly influenced by their perception of the significance of maintaining sanitation and greening. Individuals who regard sanitation as a natural occurrence rather than a personal obligation are inclined to maintain the belief that cleanliness is not a top priority in their daily lives.

Additionally, they are heavily reliant on the cleaning staff and believe that the responsibility for environmental hygiene is primarily the cleaning staff's, rather than their own. Consequently, they have a propensity to recklessly dispose of the waste they generate on a daily basis, including into the river, under the assumption that the water will transport the waste and restore it to its original quality. This is the result of a dearth of awareness and concern regarding the environmental consequences of their actions. Behavior in the preservation of environmental hygiene can be influenced by individual perceptions of the environment (Hermawan, 2015). This is consistent with the findings of Kospa's (Kospa, 2018) research, which indicates that inaccurate perceptions can result in inappropriate reasoning, which in turn can lead to inappropriate behavior.

## **2. The Role of Women in Environmental Management**

Role is a position that can be fulfilled by individuals in a society, as evidenced by their conduct in accordance with their obligations and responsibilities. In this context, the role of women in environmental management can be viewed from two domains: public roles and domestic roles. For instance, public roles may involve the development of environmental management regulations and discussions regarding environmental management. In the interim, domestic responsibilities pertain to domestic duties. Domestic responsibilities encompass a variety of tasks, including cooking, sweeping, ironing, washing dishes, caring for children, and washing clothing. The role of women in domestic waste management, greening, and environmental management education is the primary focus of this study. In addition, this researcher has discovered data regarding the function of women in environmental management in Cikeduk village, Depok district, Cirebon. This study identified three primary roles that women play in environmental management: the frontline in domestic waste management, greening, and environmental education. The significance of women's contributions to the preservation of the environment and the enhancement of the quality of life in the community is demonstrated by these three roles.

The initial discovery pertains to the function of women in the management of household waste. Organic and non-organic refuse are sorted and separated during household waste management. Organic refuse, including food scraps and leaves, is actively separated by women for the purpose of being used as animal feed and compost. In the interim, non-organic waste, including plastic, used bottles, and cans, is either recycled or sold. The practice has facilitated the reduction of refuse disposal, thereby enhancing the cleanliness and health of the environment. The traditional duties of women in managing households and natural resources often result in a greater connection to nature and the environment in ecofeminism studies. This theory presupposes that women have evolved into the guardians and preservers of biodiversity. They are responsible for the production, regeneration, consumption, and conservation of biodiversity (Shiva & Mies, 2014). This is consistent with Dwi Kartika's (2023) research, which indicates that women are instrumental in comprehending the significance of environmental protection and managing pollution. They are engaged in waste collection, sifting, processing, and education, all of which are critical components of environmental sustainability.

The second discovery pertains to the role of women in the greening of environmental management. Women engage in various initiatives that are designed to enhance the environment. Women take the initiative to plant and maintain a variety of plants, including ornamental plants, vegetables, medicinal plants, and trees, which not only enhance the domestic environment but also provide sustainable health and environmental benefits. Women frequently employ their creativity and knowledge to optimize their limited space, such as by establishing vertical gardens or placing small containers on balconies and terraces. The greening of the residential yard is a fundamental environmental initiative that can be implemented within a community. More carbon dioxide will be absorbed and there will be a greater abundance of oxygen in the presence of numerous trees and vegetation (Andriani & Sanjaya, 2022).

One of the steps taken by women to green their homes is the utilization of land. This practice has the potential to have a positive impact, such as increasing awareness of the environment, enabling individuals to utilize the plants for their daily needs, and providing greenery to the surrounding area in this dense area. This is consistent with the research conducted by Nurchasanah (2019) who stated that the role of farm women's groups in conducting limited yard utilization activities fosters a sense of environmental awareness among the general public, as well as a reduction in daily expenditures, an improvement in the economy of the residents, and a greening of the surrounding environment in this densely populated area. The traditional role of women in administering households and natural resources often results in a greater connection to nature and the environment in the study of ecofeminism. This theory presupposes that women have evolved into the guardians and preservers of biodiversity. They generate, regenerate, consume, and protect biodiversity (Shiva & Mies, 2014).

The function of women in the conduct of environmental education is the third discovery. Their influence is significant in the development of ecological awareness within the community. In particular, mothers are frequently at the forefront of educating their family members, particularly children, about the significance of environmental protection. Women set a direct example of environmentally favorable practices that other family members can emulate by cleaning, sorting waste, reducing the use of single-use plastics, and planting plants in their yards on a daily basis. The development of ecological cognizance from a young age is positively influenced by the environmental education that parents provide to their children. Parents consistently instruct their children to avoid littering, participate in yard cleanups, sort organic and non-organic refuse, and make use of unused items. For instance, they encourage children to collect discarded plastic bottles and transform them into toys or flower containers. These basic yet meaningful daily activities teach children the significance of environmental protection and the ways in which each small action can contribute to the sustainability of nature. This instruction not only imparts practical knowledge but also instills the values of environmental responsibility and care, which are expected to persist into maturity. Quality early childhood education can serve as the foundation for the development of environmental character in children. Knowledge of the environment is the primary factor in achieving environmental sustainability. This is consistent with the findings of Shofiyah and Sugito (2022) who demonstrated that environmental character education must be implemented at an early age to ensure that the next generation of children is cognizant of the importance of protecting and managing the environment as a natural resource in the area. This is crucial in order to cultivate a sense of accountability for the well-being of future generations.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study concludes that women in Cikeduk Village exhibit both positive and negative perceptions of environmental management. Women with positive perceptions see the maintenance of cleanliness and greening as crucial responsibilities that benefit health, comfort, and offer economic advantages through initiatives like tree planting. In contrast, those with negative perceptions do not view hygiene as a personal responsibility. The research also highlights the significant roles women play in environmental management within the village. They are actively involved in separating organic and non-organic waste, planting and maintaining a variety of plants, and educating their families about environmentally friendly practices. These activities not only enhance local environmental conditions but also promote greater awareness of sustainability among community members. The findings support the ecofeminist perspective, emphasizing the need for early and comprehensive environmental education to nurture a generation that is conscious and proactive about environmental issues.

To address the issues identified, it is recommended to enhance environmental education from an early age to foster a sense of personal responsibility and shift negative perceptions. Expanding women's empowerment programs can further strengthen their roles in environmental management by providing necessary resources and training for reforestation and waste management. Additionally, promoting community-wide engagement through targeted awareness campaigns can help to shift negative attitudes and encourage a more collective approach to environmental preservation. These measures will support the development of a more environmentally conscious community and reinforce the vital contributions of women in sustaining local and broader environmental health.

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