Review Questions

1. What do you understand by the term 'environment'? Explain the different perspectives to understand the human-environment relationship.

Answer

'Environment' refers to all that is around us. Literally, it means everything that surrounds us including the physical, Social world and cultural environment. In general, it includes all the forces outside the human beings to which they respond in some way.
There is more than one way of looking at the human-environment relationship.
A psychologist named Stokols (1990) describes three approaches that may be adopted to describe the human-environment relationship.
(a) The minimalist perspective assumes that the physical environment has minimal or negligible influence on human behaviour, health and well-being. The physical environment and human beings exist as parallel components.
(b) The instrumental perspective suggests that the physical environment exists mainly for use by human beings for their comfort and well-being. Most of the human influences on the environment reflect the instrumental perspective.
(c) The spiritual perspective refers to the view of the environment as something to be respected and valued rather than exploited. It implies that human beings recognise the interdependent relationship between themselves and the environment, i.e. human beings will exist and will be happy only as long as the environment is kept healthy and natural. The traditional Indian view about the environment supports the spiritual perspective.

2. "Human beings affect and are affected by the environment". Explain this statement with the help of examples.

Answer

Human beings exert their influence on the natural environment for fulfilling their physical needs and other purposes. The human-environment relationship can be appreciated fully by understanding that
the two influence each other, and depend on each other for their survival and maintenance. Some aspects of the environment influence human perception.
(i) Environmental influences on perception : Some aspects of the environment influence human
perception. For example, a tribal society of Africa lives in circular huts, that is, in houses without angular walls. They show less error in a geometric illusion (the Muller-Lyer illusion) than people

from cities, who live in houses with angular walls.

(ii) Environmental influences on emotions : The environment affects our emotional reactions as well. Watching nature in any form, whether it is a quietly flowing river, a smiling flower, or a tranquil mountain top, provides a kind of joy that cannot be matched by any other experience. Natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, landslides, quakes on the earth or under the ocean, can affect people's emotions to such an extent that they experience deep depression and sorrow, a sense of complete helplessness and lack of control over their lives.

(iii) Ecological influences on occupation, living style and attitudes : The natural environment of a particular region determines whether people living in that region rely on agriculture (as in the plains), or on other occupations such as hunting and gathering (as in forest, mountainous or desert regions), or on industries (as in areas that are not fertile enough for agriculture). In turn, the occupation determines the lifestyle and attitudes of the residents of a particular geographical region.

3. What is noise? Discuss the effects of noise on human behaviour.

Answer

Any sound that is annoying or irritating, and felt to be unpleasant is said to be noise. From common experience it is known that noise, especially for long periods of time, is uncomfortable, and puts people in an unpleasant mood.

Effects of noise on human behaviour:

(i) When the task being performed is a simple mental task, such as addition of numbers, noise does not affect overall performance, whether it is loud or soft. In such situations, people adapt, or 'get
used' to noise.

(ii) If the task being performed is very interesting, then, too, the presence of noise does not affect performance. This is because the nature of the task helps the individual to pay full attention to the task, and ignore the noise. This may also be one kind of adaptation.

(iii) When the noise comes at intervals, and in an unpredictable way, it is experienced as more disturbing than if the noise is continuously present.

(iv) When the task being performed is difficult, or requires full concentration, then intense, unpredictable, and uncontrollable noise reduces the level of task performance.

(v) When tolerating or switching off the noise is within the control of the person, the number of errors in task performance decreases.

(vi) In terms of emotional effects, noise above a certain level causes annoyance, and can also lead to sleep disturbance. These effects are also reduced if the noise is controllable, or is necessary as a part of the person's occupation. However, continued exposure to uncontrollable and annoying noise can have harmful effects on mental health.

4. What are the salient features of crowding? Explain the major psychological consequences of crowding.

Answer

Crowding to a feeling of discomfort because there are too many people or things around us, giving us the experience of physical restriction, and sometimes the lack of privacy. Crowding is the person's reaction to the presence of a large number of persons within a particular area or space. When this number goes beyond a certain level, it causes stress to individuals caught in that situation. In this sense, crowding is another example of an environmental stressor.

The experience of crowding has the following features :

- Feeling of discomfort,
- Loss or decrease in privacy,
- Negative view of the space around the person, and
- Feeling of loss of control over social interaction.

(i) Crowding and high density may lead to abnormal behaviour and aggression. This was shown many years ago in a study of rats. These animals were placed in an enclosure, initially in small
numbers. As their population increased within this enclosed space, they started showing aggressive and unusual behaviour, such as biting the tails of other rats. This aggressive behaviour increased to such an extent that ultimately the animals died in large numbers, thus decreasing the population in the enclosure. Among human beings also, an increase in population has sometimes been found to be accompanied by an increase in violent crime.

(ii) Crowding leads to lowered performance on difficult tasks that involve cognitive processes, and has adverse effects on memory and the emotional state. These negative effects are seen to a smaller extent in people who are used to crowded surroundings.

(iii) Children growing up in very crowded households show lower academic performance. They also show a weaker tendency to continue working on a task if they are unsuccessful at it, compared to children growing up in non-crowded households. They experience greater conflict with their parents, and get less support from their family members.

5. Why is the concept of 'personal space' important for human beings? Justify your answer with the help of an example.

Answer

Personal space, or the comfortable physical space one generally likes to maintain around oneself, is affected by a high density environment. In a crowded context, there is a restriction on personal space, and this can also be a cause of negative reactions to crowding.
For example: In social situations,human beings like to maintain a certain physical distance from the person with whom they are interacting. This is called interpersonal physical distance, and is a part of a broader concept called personal space, i.e. the physical space

we like to have all around us. One reason for the negative reactions to crowding, as described earlier, is the decrease in personal space.