

Abstract

Sundblad, E-L (2008). *People's knowledge about climate change: Uncertainty as a guide to future commitments*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Knowledge of climate change is provided by scientists to other groups in society who have to interact to establish sustainable development. Hence, the knowledge must reach people and the content must be evaluated as important and relevant. In **Study 1**, knowledge and confidence in one's own knowledge was studied in a survey among four groups in society: experts, politicians, environmental journalists and laypersons. The study revealed gradually decreasing knowledge levels from experts to journalists, politicians and laypersons. The confidence levels showed a similar pattern. Both knowledge and confidence levels were higher for causes than state and consequences of climate change. All groups had less knowledge of health consequences as compared to weather and sea/glacier consequences. The realism of confidence in their own knowledge was somewhat higher among journalists than among experts, and relatively low among politicians and laypersons. **Study II** tested to what extent scientific knowledge of various domains was related to cognitive and affective risk judgements among laypersons. Subgroups divided by gender, being a parent or not, education, age and type of residence were analyzed. The results revealed that knowledge of both health consequences and causes of climate change was positively related to cognitive and affective risk judgements. Gender influenced affective but not cognitive risk judgements, as women were more worried than men. **Study III** revealed that information of scientific uncertainty of climate consequences influence risk perception. **Study IV** revealed that temporal distance to negative environmental consequences did not influence participants' intention to mitigate CO₂ emissions. Taken together, this research represents some steps towards a greater understanding of what facilitates and hinders the process toward a sustainable society. The studies show that scientific knowledge about climate change seems to be disseminated in an unbiased manner in society. Moreover, the results support the claim that both knowledge and confidence levels will increase when people learn more about climate change. In particular, risk awareness can be raised by increased knowledge of health consequences and of causes of climate change.

Key words: climate change knowledge, confidence in one's own knowledge, risk perception of climate change, scientific uncertainty, temporal discount

Eva-Lotta Sundblad, Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, P.O Box 500, S-405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden. Phone: + 46 31 786 16 62, Fax + 46 786 46 28, E-mail: eva-lotta.sundblad@psy.gu.se

ISSN: 1101-718X ISBN: 978-91-628-7555-8 ISRN GU/PSYK/AVH-205-SE

People's knowledge about climate change: Uncertainty as a guide to future commitments

Eva-Lotta Sundblad
Department of Psychology, 2008

Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi,
som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten
vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligen försvaras fredagen
den 26 september 2008, kl. 10.00, sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen,
Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Gisela Böhm, Institutt for
samfunnspsykologi, Universitetet i Bergen, Norge



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG