

You care less about the environment in old age, finds new research

Submitted by: BlueSky Public Relations Ltd

Thursday, 22 October 2020

As we reach old age, we care less about being environmentally-friendly, finds new research from BI Norwegian Business School (<https://www.bi.edu/>).

Professors Benny Geys and Rune Jørgen Sørensen, and Associate Professor Tom-Reiel Heggedal, analysed data from a survey given to individuals every four years to record political attitudes and preferences, including preferences for protecting the environment. The survey questions to what extent respondents desire more to be done for environmental protection, even if people's standard of living is reduced. This study used data collected between 1989 and 2013, involving 2,476 individual respondents aged 18 to 79.

Their results showed that growing older has a negative effect on expressed preferences for environmental protection - particularly among the most elderly. Environmental concern increased from the age of 18 and peaked around the age of 43. However, growing older then made people less likely to place emphasis on protecting the environment. This may have an impact on future environmental policies, especially in Western societies, as individuals are living longer and older people are more eager voters than younger people.

Prof. Geys says,

"Investments in environmental protection are expensive for current living generations and the benefits will not be seen for many years. The elderly, due to their shorter remaining lifespans, profit less from these future benefits. Also, the young, due to their lack of descendants and deficient knowledge of environmental risks, may not give consideration to these future benefits. This suggests a life-cycle effect with individuals placing different levels of emphasis on protecting the environment depending on their age."

These findings are important since differences between the young and old in terms of their concerns about global warming have been understood as a generational phenomenon. If this were correct, pro-environmental attitudes would become more prevalent when the current elderly pass away. The new findings suggest, however, that support for saving the environment declines over a person's lifetime. This makes future policies less rather than more environmentally friendly.

For more information, a copy of the research paper, or to speak with the researchers, please contact Kyle Grizzell from BlueSky PR on 07904706136 or on kyle@bluesky-pr.com