The Effects of Environmental Disparities on the Environmental Awareness of High School Students in the Greater Birmingham Area

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The EPA defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Research shows that environmental injustice can have significant effects on those who live in low-income, predominantly Black neighborhoods. Because of the demographics of several communities in the Greater Birmingham region, residents are in danger of facing continual environmental disparities due to injustice. This research aims to study whether students in areas vulnerable to facing environmental disparities are aware of the disparities they may be facing and how facing environmental disparities may have an impact on students' perceptions or ideas about various environmental issues. During the study, hour-long focus group discussions were held at two different high schools in the Birmingham area. The results from performing said focus group discussions show that many students experiencing environmental disparities have low environmental awareness. Additionally, it was found that there is a connection between the type of disparity described by students and their ideas on environmental protection. Furthermore, this research shows that many students experiencing environmental disparities believe that the most effective way to receive environmental education is through conversations with environmental justice advocates or through social media efforts. This proposes a possible solution to the lack of environmental awareness students exhibited in this study.

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