

# Study: Pollution worries women more

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BALTIMORE—Things like nuclear waste, chemical pollution and food poisoning worry women a lot more than they do men, researchers reported Sunday.

The notion that public fears of environmental hazards are irrational in the light of known science is itself an oversimplification that ignores the facts, said Paul Slovic, a University of Oregon psychologist who studies risk assessment.

Slovic's study was among several presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that focused on gender differences. Other researchers highlighted differences in peace negotiations and sought to explain a decline in domestic homicides.

While social researchers long have known of different attitudes about health risks held by men and women, Slovic's study of 1,500 people cast new light on the matter by finding that most white women and non-whites of both sexes are more worried about environmental health risks than white males.

Slovic said his study found that only about 30 percent of white males apparently have an extremely low fear of environmental risk.

But "this 30 percent go to extremes at seeing no risk in most things," said Slovic, referring to his data. "They tend to be better educated with higher incomes,

## Many men said to trust 'experts'

more conservative and place more trust in experts than most people."

These men promote the notion that fears of environmental hazards driving public policy are irrational and that scientists should make these decisions instead of public opinion, Slovic said.

That idea underlies the current move in Congress to rewrite pollution laws, he contends.

"The problem is that our scientific understanding is limited," Slovic said. "Science is struggling to understand how exposure to small amounts of toxins may affect human health. Scientists are working at the limits of their knowledge, and they disagree.

"Scientists let their emotions influence their judgment, just like anyone else."

Slovic's study also found there were people who held extreme views that exaggerate the extent of environmental hazards. But unlike the risk minimizers who tended to be well-off white males, there was no easy way to categorize the risk maximizers, he said.

Another psychologist, Frank Beers of the University of Colorado at Boulder, presented findings suggesting that gender influences how people assess questions of war and peace.

In a study of college undergraduates, Beers found that women

tended to react to aggressive actions by an enemy breaking a peace treaty with a measure of forgiveness and efforts to re-establish the peace while men tended to favor retribution.

"Our research findings are consistent with professor Slovic's," said Beers. "We find women are more risk-sensitive than men."

Changing attitudes of men and women in domestic situations were described by Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist from the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

Rosenfeld asserts that a decline in domestic homicides seen over the past two decades stems in part from women's growing economic independence.

Over the past 20 years, the domestic homicide rate in cities like St. Louis and Chicago has fallen by about 50 percent, said Rosenfeld.

"In the early 1970s about 15 percent of homicide victims in St. Louis and Chicago were killed by their sexual partners," said Rosenfeld. "That rate is now about 8 percent."

One reason for the change, he said, is that "women are now making more money than they once did, and they aren't as dependent upon a man as they once were.

"They no longer have to stay in an abusive relationship until their man kills them or they kill him.

Also, as the earning ability of poor women has improved relative to men, male partners find their woman's economic value is greater."

The pardon last month of Illinois Death Row inmate Guinevere Garcia by Gov. Edgar also came in for scrutiny at the meeting.

Leigh Buchanan Bienen, a lecturer at Northwestern University's law school, noted that since 1973 only one woman in the United States has been executed, compared to 302 men.

She said that based upon the record, men sentenced to death should be able to make a good case to the courts of sexual discrimination, although none yet has tried that.

The reason that society almost never executes women who commit the most heinous crimes, such as the double murder of her young sons last year by Susan Smith, is that women don't fit the stereotype as villains, Bienen said.

"We are much more able to empathize with a woman who commits a crime than with a man," she said. "Any time you put a woman in the (trial) dock, she's likely to be someone's mother. By the time the trial is over, the public often can see how she was sinned against, as well as sinning, and society doesn't want an execution."