1-26-2016

Utah’s oldest show the most concern for future water shortages

Viviane Baji
Utah State University

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Recommended Citation
Baji, Viviane, "Utah’s oldest show the most concern for future water shortages" (2016). Research on Capitol Hill. Paper 31.
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/roch/31

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I. Introduction
Utah is set to double in population by 2050. It is unclear whether current water supplies will be able to accommodate the needs of the future growth. Young people will be in their prime when water shortage predictions come to fruition, so it is important to know how concerned they are about the water issues that will affect them. An understanding of the relationship between age and water shortage concern may also contribute to the development of social science theories relating age and environmental attitudes and behavior.

Research Question: “Are young people more concerned about water shortages?”

Expectation: Young people are more concerned about water shortages than other age groups.

II. Methods
Adults were randomly intercepted by students at 28 urban grocery stores in Utah and asked to complete a brief iPad survey concerning their perceptions of water issues. The Utah Water Survey contains responses from nearly 7,000 Utahns and has a response rate of 40.6%.

The dependent variables (3 survey questions, each measured on 1-5 scale), shown in survey question 1, 2, and 3, were combined into a single index variable to capture variability in the concerns about and perceptions of water shortages in Utah (Figure 1).

III. Results
The analysis showed that age is positively related to concern about water supply. The older people in Utah, aged 50 and over, are the most concerned.

All age groups are somewhat concerned about water supply but the youngest, age 18-29, are noticeably less concerned about water shortages. Those in the 30-39 age group and 40-49 age group are similar in their concern, scoring between the youngest and oldest age groups.

IV. Conclusions
The results rejected the hypothesis that young people report higher environmental concern than respondents in older age groups, underscoring the need to rigorously investigate beliefs some might consider “common sense.” Younger people are less concerned about water supply (despite the fact that they are more likely to be impacted).

Lack of concern for water supply may hinder the development of political support to address predicted water scarcity.