

**FROM CHILDREN'S DIRECT NATURE EXPERIENCES TO CONSERVATION
WILLINGNESS: MEDIATING EFFECTS OF BIODIVERSITY KNOWLEDGE AND
AFFECTIVE ATTITUDES**

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Abstract: Childhood DNEs are crucial to create lasting relationships with nature that will in turn influence long-term biodiversity conservation. However, as children increasingly become urbanites, they also get progressively separated from nature. A loss of direct nature experiences (DNEs) is worrisome because it can influence conservation willingness (CW) in multiple ways that are not fully understood. This study aimed to examine the serial mediation of biodiversity knowledge (BK) and affective attitudes (AA) in the relationship between DNE frequentness and conservation willingness (CW). Data was gathered using an online survey questionnaire administered to 429 11–12 years-old schoolchildren in the Maldives. A two-serial mediation analysis confirmed an underreported, predictive sequential pathway from DNEs through BK to AA to CW. Also, DNE frequentness exerted positive direct effects on BK and AA. While BK exerted neither significant direct nor independent mediating effects on CW, AA exerted both effects on CW. The direct effects of BK on AA are vital to re-orient innate, misconstrued, or biased negative attitudes to promote CW. Overall, DNE frequentness has positive effects on CW due to indirect effects rather than direct ones. The findings have implications for educators and other stakeholders to facilitate appropriate, contextually meaningful DNEs that enhance understanding of biodiversity knowledge and stimulate positive shifts in attitude as a means to promote conservation willingness. This is an indispensable step towards successful education for sustainable development and long-term biodiversity conservation.

Keywords: Direct nature experiences, biodiversity knowledge, affective attitudes, conservation willingness, education for sustainable development