

International Journal of Multi Research

Online ISSN: 3107 - 7676

Received: 02-11-2025

IJMR 2026; 2(1): 41-46

Accepted: 03-12-2025

2026 January - February

Published: 27-12-2025

www.allmultiresearchjournal.com

Understanding Barriers Towards a Sustainable Lifestyle: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Sustainable Lifestyles, as defined by Burn (2011), is a philosophy that promotes a shift in our values, behaviors, and lifestyles. Through community learning and shared experiences, we strive to live more sustainably. However an individual may not act in a sustainable manner even if he has the intention to do so because of some hurdles which may be termed barriers to sustainable lifestyle due to lack of opportunity, knowledge, cost etc.

Purpose: The study seeks to investigate college students' knowledge about sustainable lifestyle practices, the obstacles towards such practices, ideas and suggestions for developing an understanding of sustainable lifestyle.

Methodology: The sample included 32 undergraduate colleges from various districts in West Bengal. Stratified random sampling technique was followed to choose the under-graduate college affiliated by various universities within different districts of West Bengal. The sample (N-180) considered in this study were the college students whose ages lie between 17 to 21 years. The sample comprised 18 categories each containing 10 respondents. The interview used four open-ended questions and the responses of these questions were classified into separate categories and analyzed for in-depth understanding of the issues.

Findings: The undergraduate college students were asked whether old habits are barriers to environmental action. The themes that emerged from the undergraduate college student's responses include lack of skill, knowledge, confusion, inadequate time and cost, poor monitoring and evaluation, lock in situation (reluctance to change old habits), social barriers, and insufficient incentives.

Keyword: Barriers, Sustainable Lifestyle and Undergraduate College Students

Introduction

Recently, in light of research on sustainability, specifying the links between societal and human development, there has been a significant paradigm shift towards more responsible sustainable lifestyles (Bandara & Alahakoon, 2023) [2]. Sustainable Lifestyles is all about collective learning and

action. It's a space where we can work together to re-evaluate our priorities, daily habits, and overall way of life, with the goal of living more sustainably (Burn, 2011). Previous research only focus sustainable living as simply adjusting habits, it goes deeper. It's about a fundamental shift in how we function as a society, including how we interact, perceive

the world, and make decision (Gilby *et al.* 2019, Lorek, 2010; Rijnhout and Lorek, 2012; Giford *et al.* 2018; Mao *et al.* 2019)^[6, 14, 15, 16]. Byrne & O'Regan, (2014) opined that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not be the most effective option for administering information. Bellou, Petreniti & Skanavis (2017)^[3] found that limited knowledge (Holison, 2023)^[11]; low interest and ineffective environmental policies (Longo *et al.*, 2019) were perceived to be the primary barriers hindering sustainability strategies at the University level. Though knowledge alone may not guarantee environmentally friendly actions. Heeren *et al.* (2016)^[10] supports this notion and idea of transforming behavior for sustainable habits rather than focusing on education about sustainability.

Avila *et al.* (2017)^[5] identified limited administrative commitment as the most vital significant barrier to achieve the goal of sustainable development. Similar observations were documented in prior research (Atairet & Mboho, 2024; Lozano *et al.*, 2015)^[13]. Additionally, several challenges hinder progress: limited access to necessary technologies, a lack of environmental awareness and concern, potentially ineffective university environmental committees, and a scarcity of sustainable buildings that showcase sustainability principles in action. According to a 2015 report by the UNEP, several obstacles impede progress towards sustainability which includes:

- **Fragmented governance:** A lack of well-coordinated and inclusive decision-making structures across different levels (local, national, international).
- **Knowledge gaps:** Limited shared understanding and a deficit of knowledge about alternative solutions for sustainable development.
- **Dominant consumerist culture:** The prevailing view that equates a sustainable approach with simply consuming more "sustainable" products.

The current study seeks to investigate college students' knowledge about sustainable lifestyle practices, the obstacles

towards such practices, ideas and suggestions for developing an understanding of sustainable lifestyle.

Methodology

Students are one of the most important parts of the population in the development of a more sustainable society. The sample included 32 undergraduate colleges from various districts in West Bengal. The research study conducted a primary survey for qualitative research and collected qualitative data by interviewing methods (Neuman, W. L., 1997)^[17]. Stratified random sampling technique was followed to choose the under-graduate college affiliated by various universities within different districts of West Bengal. This simply means that researcher strategically select participants based on specific characteristics that make them ideal sources of information for the study undertaken. This targeted approach prioritizes gathering the richest data possible to answer the research questions effectively. The sample (N-180) considered in this study were the college students whose ages lie between 17 to 21 years. The sample comprised 18 categories each containing 10 respondents as shown in the table no-01. To elicit in-depth responses from college students, the interview employed four open-ended questions, prompting them to elaborate on each point. Each interview lasted approximately for 40-50 minutes. The responses of these questions were analyzed for in-depth understanding of the issues.

Results and Discussion

The researcher wanted to know in detail the perception of the undergraduate college students regarding sustainable lifestyle. The questions were related to college students' knowledge about sustainable lifestyle practices, role of effective various factors, the obstacles to such practices, ideas and suggestions for developing sustainable lifestyles. The responses from four open-ended questions were classified into separate categories and presented below in the form of themes. Responses have been coded in the form of percentage both in the table no-01 and in the tables representing bar graphs as well.

Table 1: Qualitative Analysis

Statement Codes	Que-1						Que-2						Que-3						Que-4					
	Concept of SL			Obstacles of SL (Lack of...)			Overcome			Ideas for SL in Future														
	Environmental, economic and social dimensions	Preservation of natural resources	Environmental, economic, social and Environmental dimensions	Only environment	Habits and Practice	Personal (Wrong conceptualization etc.)	Political and financial barriers	Commitment & initiatives	information and communication	excessive requirements & standards	Institutional & Social barriers	Poor monitoring and evaluation systems (Government barriers)	Institutional and family initiatives	Renewable resources	Fund raising and funding	Write information	Various sustainability programmes	Government Initiatives with NGO	Interdisciplinary	Legislation and guidelines for SL	Quality training for SL	empowerment and Globalization	Short- & Long-term strategic planning	Vote for Sustainability
GAR (10)	7	4	7	4	3	8	0	4	8	0	2	2	8	5	4	5	2	4	5	2	5	3	5	5
GAS (10)	6	5	7	1	1	8	0	4	7	5	7	5	0	0	0	8	7	0	7	0	8	5	8	8
GAU (10)	7	8	7	3	3	8	0	4	8	5	2	8	0	4	0	2	2	0	5	5	2	8	2	2
GCR (10)	3	2	4	2	1	3	4	5	2	4	3	3	4	8	0	5	5	4	8	8	5	2	5	5
GCS (10)	6	5	5	5	2	0	8	5	4	2	8	4	4	8	0	8	8	5	2	2	5	5	4	8
GCU (10)	1	8	4	3	5	0	3	8	5	5	3	4	5	2	0	3	2	8	5	5	8	8	5	3
GSR (10)	7	9	7	3	1	5	4	2	8	8	4	3	8	5	0	3	5	2	8	8	2	3	8	5
GSS (10)	3	9	5	4	3	0	5	5	2	3	5	5	2	8	4	4	8	5	3	3	5	4	2	4
GSU (10)	6	8	8	5	0	0	0	8	5	4	0	8	5	3	5	5	3	8	4	4	8	5	5	5

BAR (10)	7	0	3	4	3	4	5	3	8	5	7	5	8	4	8	5	4	3	5	5	3	0	8	5
BAS (10)	4	5	4	5	0	5	7	4	3	0	7	8	3	5	2	4	5	4	8	0	4	5	3	4
BAU (10)	6	7	5	3	5	8	5	5	4	5	8	2	4	0	5	0	0	5	2	5	5	4	4	0
BCR (10)	3	2	0	2	1	2	8	0	5	7	3	5	5	5	8	0	5	0	5	4	0	0	5	0
BCS (10)	4	6	5	5	1	5	2	5	5	5	4	0	0	7	3	5	4	5	8	0	5	0	0	5
BCU (10)	7	8	7	1	3	0	2	4	5	8	5	5	4	0	4	4	0	7	3	0	4	5	5	4
BSR (10)	7	8	7	3	0	3	8	0	7	3	0	8	7	0	5	6	0	0	4	5	0	0	4	3
BSS (10)	9	8	8	4	0	4	3	0	8	4	7	2	4	0	0	2	5	0	5	2	0	2	0	1
BSU (10)	6	3	8	4	0	4	3	5	5	4	8	5	3	5	5	6	4	0	0	5	5	4	0	1
Total (N=180)	55%	58%	56%	33%	17%	37%	37%	39%	55%	42%	46%	45%	41%	38%	29%	41%	38%	33%	48%	35%	41%	35%	40%	37%
Boys (N=90)	51	52	60	33	21	35	26	50	54	40	37	46	40	47	14	47	46	40	52	41	53	47	48	25
Girls(N=90)	58	64	52	34	14	38	47	28	55	45	54	44	42	28	44	35	30	26	44	28	28	22	32	50
Arts (N=60)	61	48	55	33	25	68	28	40	63	33	55	50	38	30	31	40	33	26	53	28	45	41	50	40
Commer (N=60)	40	51	41	30	21	16	45	45	43	51	43	35	36	50	25	41	40	48	51	31	45	33	40	41
Science(N=60)	63	75	71	38	6	26	38	33	58	43	40	51	48	35	31	43	41	25	40	45	33	30	31	31
Rural(N=60)	56	41	46	30	15	41	48	23	63	45	31	43	66	45	41	40	35	21	58	53	25	13	58	38
Semi Ur (N=60)	53	63	56	40	11	36	41	38	48	31	63	40	21	46	15	51	61	31	55	11	45	35	28	50
Urban(N=60)	55	70	65	31	26	33	21	56	53	51	43	53	35	23	31	33	18	46	31	40	53	56	35	25

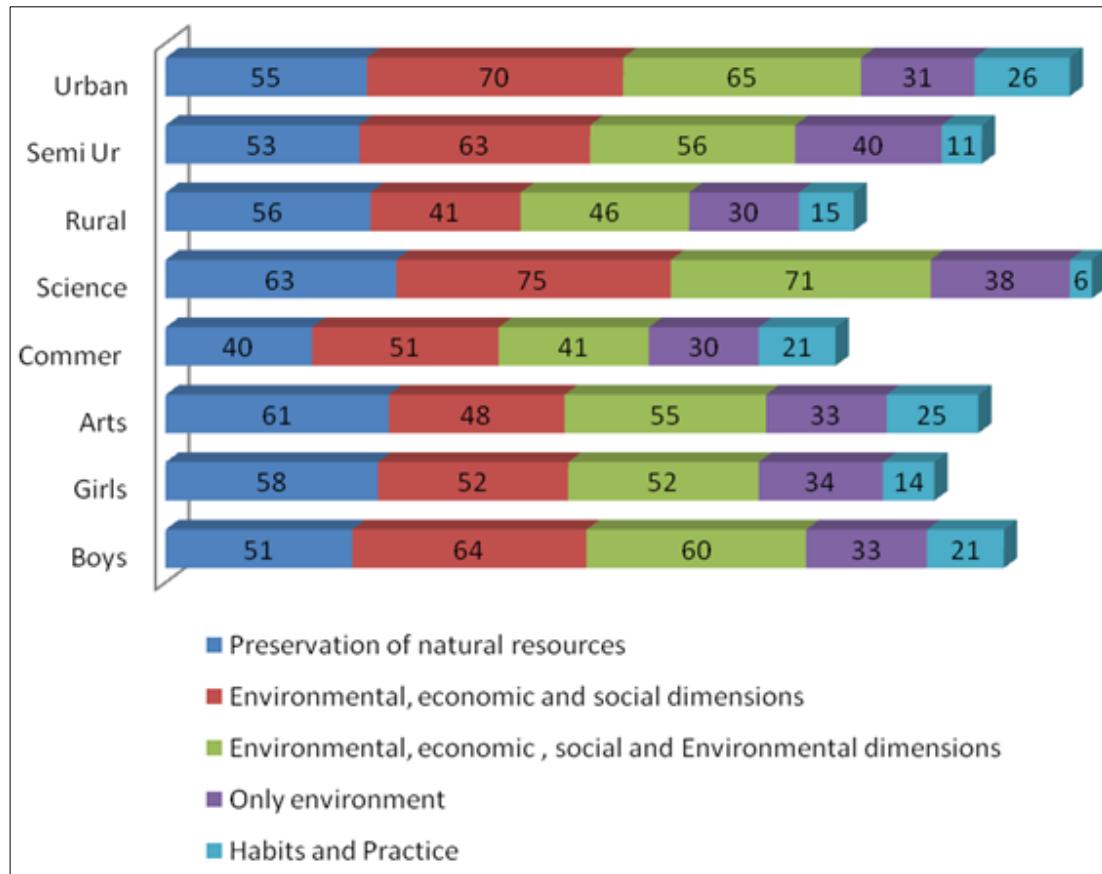
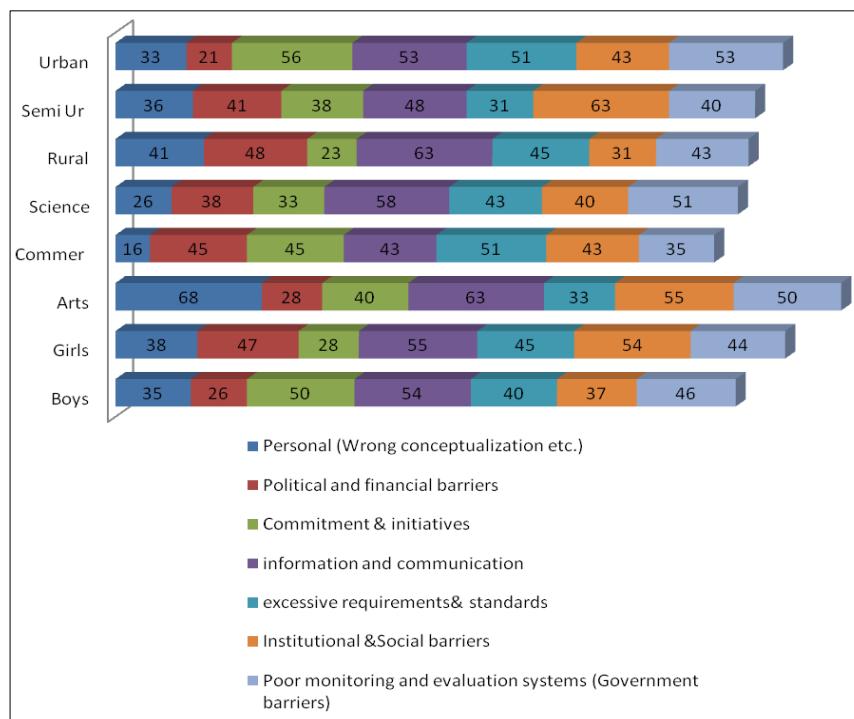


Fig 1: Graphical Representation about the Concept of Sustainable Lifestyle

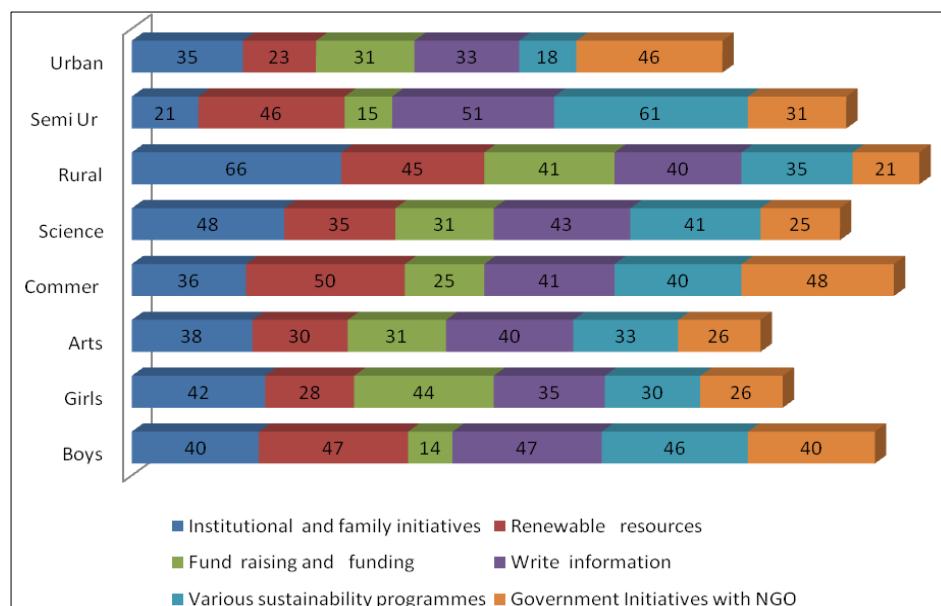
Concept of Sustainable Lifestyle: Respondents in our study were asked about their understanding of the term sustainable lifestyle and what it encompasses. Their perception is that a sustainable lifestyle could not be defined in terms of economic or social or environment or only environment. Mostly 58% of the respondents apprehended the concept of preserving natural resources. Girls college students' belonging to science stream opined the fact that by

conserving our natural resources we could have the desired sustainable lifestyle. Only 17% of the respondents conceptualize the fact that sustainable habits and practices is an important notion behind sustainable lifestyle. By habits they mean the concept of reduce, reuse and recycle. According to them if we develop these habits and indulge ourselves to practice those in a routine manner then it will definitely help us to move on the path of sustainable lifestyle.

**Fig 2:** Graphical Representation of Obstacles for Sustainable Lifestyle

Obstacles for Sustainable Lifestyle- The analysis continues by addressing the barriers or obstacles that respondents faced while practicing sustainable lifestyle such as wrong conceptualization etc, political and financial barriers, excessive requirement and standard, and poor monitoring and evaluation systems. Respondents (55%) pertaining to the stream of Arts residing in rural areas believed that improper information and communication is the dominant barrier behind achieving sustainability. They said, "In almost all electronic gadgets, we see 3 stars, 4 stars and 5 stars. But what it actually signifies, most of the people do not know and for this improper information people could not communicate with others". One respondent said, "Improper information is responsible for improper knowledge about the environment and in repercussion society is totally unaware about the interlink between different factors of the

environment which are destroying our environment". With regard to our requirements, respondents opined that, "to achieve a sustainable lifestyle we first make each and every individual to understand the chain of different factors which directly or indirectly affects our environment. Otherwise, society will be the toughest barrier that will be hard to overcome in the near future". The second most often mentioned barrier is institutional and social barriers. 46% of college students' talked about the institutional and social barrier where lack of strategic planning is another hurdle to achieve sustainability. However boys respondents (39%) located in urban cities stated that commitment and initiatives is the prime precondition for sustainable lifestyle. Often it has been noted that having proper training, individuals are reluctant to develop habits of sustainable lifestyle.

**Fig 3:** Graphical Representation of Suggestions to Overcome Sustainability Lifestyle

Overcome: When respondents were asked for the solutions to overcome these barriers, “*Institution and family should come first*” were the voices from most of the students (41%). Irrespective of gender, place or stream respondents echoed the same notion and quoted, “charity begins from home; this global problem could be overcome if every family has a clear concept of sustainable living and changes the lifestyle as per the demand of sustainable lifestyle”. However the same percentage of students stated that the hurdles could be overcome if a written leaflet is distributed in every household just like the leaflet is distributed at election time. This leaflet will tell about the concept of sustainable lifestyle and Do’s and Don’ts for sustainable lifestyle. In the context of renewable resources, they explained that, “a fast growing population is responsible for depleting natural resources at a

fast rate and are blamed for creating unsustainable situations. It is believed that these resources have the ability to fulfill the world's demand for energy resources, protect the environment if they are maintained properly. Therefore to live a sustainable lifestyle we should protect our renewable resources”. To find a solution to overcome hurdles of sustainable living. Some 29% of the respondents talked about fundraising. About 33% of respondents stationed in urban areas voted for Government initiatives along with NGOs to handle such delicate and indispensable situations (Holison, 2023) [11]. They stated that the Government should give prime importance to such situations otherwise such development would be of no use. In addition they mentioned the introduction of some sustainability programmes as a measure to overcome sustainability issues.

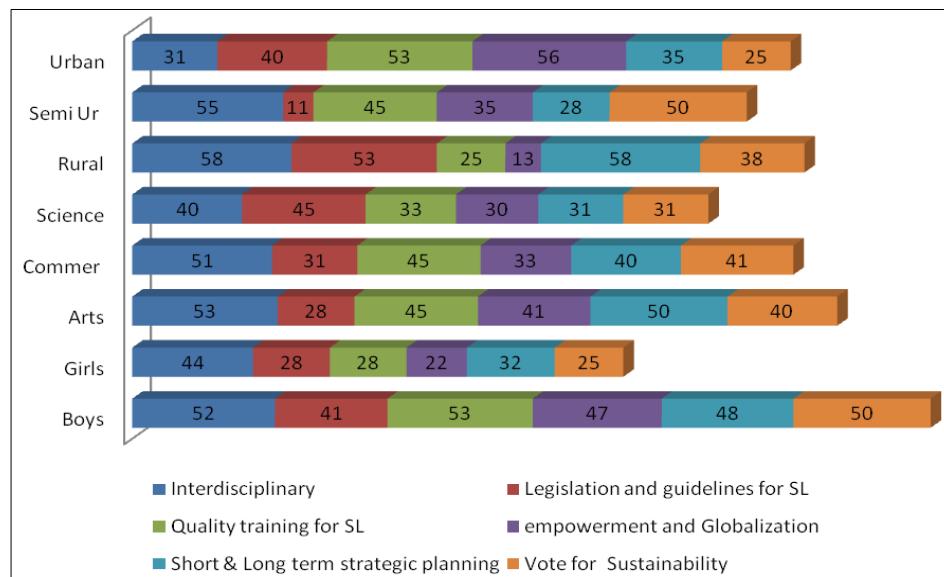


Fig 4: Graphical Representation of Innovative Ideas towards Achieving Sustainability Lifestyle

Ideas for Sustainable Lifestyle: Respondents referred most to the interdisciplinary activities when they were asked about the ideas for sustainable lifestyle. Such activities allow knowledge to be transferred between individuals (48%). In a way, the community will be benefited. However respondents (41%) from diverse backgrounds were of the opinion that quality training for sustainable lifestyle has now become the most urgent need of the society. They mentioned that, “The Government has organized many training sessions for creating awareness about the environment among the individuals”. Around 35% of respondents believed that such training will empower people about the environment and aid in the process of globalization. Respondents also highlighted adhering to the guidelines of SL and following strategic planning. Some 37% respondents, especially female students raised their voices to “*Vote for sustainability*”. Under this they talked about the ideas that, “before buying anything, we should think twice about how much this purchase will benefit the environment. While purchasing we should boycott those products which are recklessly damaging the environment. Changing driving habits by using a cycle or carpool or public transport or even a short distance walk will reduce carbon footprint in the environment. Changing one from non-vegetarian to vegetarian will also help the environment from pollution. Also the habit of purchasing bottled water should be reduced as plastic bottles are notoriously harmful to communities and wildlife. To save our beautiful earth we should vote for this.

Conclusion

Students clearly point out the nature of various external and internal factors regarding sustainable lifestyle. This implies providing equal justice to all. College students are of mixed opinions, some regard that one supreme power or ultimate reality can only control the laws of nature. Again some view that man has to over exploit nature for the development of prosperity and progress. As a positive aspect it leads to invention of technological devices on the other hand negatively speaking results in destruction and disaster of mankind as well. Participants do feel guilty regarding wastage of resources, they confessed the difficulty of practicing 3 R's in their daily life. They categorically mentioned the nature of reuse, reduction and recycling performed in their daily activities. Most of the participants admitted that it will be very difficult to change present habits which are one of the major barriers regarding sustainable lifestyle practices. In addition to this, insufficient education, confusion, inadequate knowledge (Holison, 2023) [11], poor monitoring, poor revaluation, insufficient time and the high cost are some of the other barriers or challenges faced by the students. They also pointed out that due to lack of opportunities individual attitudes (Holison, 2023; Atairet & Mboho, 2024) [11] towards such practices are not carried out smoothly. Unlike all other research, the present study also suffers from various limitations or shortcomings. The present research findings have both theoretical and practical relevance. In similar manner the present research highlights the areas that will help to enrich Environmental Education

practice, if proper attention is given to it. This study also highlights vital issues of interrelation between sustainability and college student's lifestyle patterns, barriers regarding lifestyle and new innovative ideas regarding sustainable lifestyle practices. Previously researchers were mainly concerned with environmental awareness and knowledge to understand environment related behavior but in the present day scenario the barriers are being recognized.

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How to Cite This Article

Ali R. Understanding Barriers Towards a Sustainable Lifestyle: A Qualitative Analysis. *International Journal of Multi Research*. 2026; 2(1): 41–46.

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