COVID-19 & the benefits of contact with nature for mental health: Early findings

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Google estimates of park visitation change across England

Covid Lockdown:
Level 1 - Stay at home (e.g. Spain)
Levels 2/3 - some public space access (e.g. UK)
1) Contact with nature & mental health pre Covid
   - Nature visits
   - Gardens

2) During Covid
   - Spike in nature visits
   - Gardens/visits & mental health in UK
   - Gardens/visits & mental health across Europe

3) Early (tentative) take home messages
1) Contact with nature & mental health pre Covid
   - Nature visits
   - Gardens
Visiting nature & mental health

Monitor of Environment with the Natural Environment (MENE)
2009-2019 ~40,000 people a year (total n = 460,000)
– fully representative (Official National Statistics status)

White, Alcock, Grellier, Wheeler, Hartig, Warber, Bone, Depledge & Fleming, (2019). 120 minutes of nature contact per week is positively related to health and wellbeing. *Scientific Reports, 9*, 7730
Spending time in the garden is positively associated with health and wellbeing: Results from a national survey in England.

Controlling for wide set of individual & area variables

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Trends in park search & use during lockdown

Search interest for "parks near me" in the last 12 months (Google, Great Britain)

Google estimates of park visitation change across England

But the spike was not present for all groups – some groups visited less (e.g. poor health)

Self-reported changes

Currently combining April-June: 2009-2019 in MENE to look at change in nature visits and garden use
Visiting nature more often than usual during lockdown

Associated with increased happiness, eudaimonic wellbeing and overall life satisfaction (positive outcomes)

Not associated with less worry/anxiety or loneliness (negative outcomes)

White, de Bell, Elliott & Taylor (2020) Nature contact and wellbeing before and during Covid (Preliminary results)
Nature contact & subjective wellbeing

MENE 2009-2019 (N = 2,721)

PNS 2020 (N = 1,177)

Preliminary unadjusted models

White, de Bell, Elliott & Taylor (2020) Nature contact and wellbeing before and during Covid (Preliminary results)
Likelihood of depression symptoms during lockdown

Covid Lockdown:
Level 1 - Stay at home (e.g. Spain)
Levels 2/3 - some public space access (e.g. UK)

April/May 2020
Online convenience sample
N = 6,080
> 20 countries

OR (95% CIs) of Depression symptoms

Nature view
Private access

Controlling for age, gender, h/h size, income, education, children, dog.

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3) Early (tentative) take home messages
1) Pre-Covid: nature visits/gardens related to mental health & wellbeing

2) Covid UK: spike in visits when restrictions lifted; not all groups (poor health)

3) Increased nature visits associated with positive mental health but NOT lower anxiety/loneliness

4) Compared to Springs (2009-2019), Spring 2020 associated with lower life satisfaction largely independently of garden access/visits

5) Across Europe, having nature views from home associated with lower likelihood of depression and anxiety symptoms

6) Having a garden only associated with lower likelihood of depression and anxiety symptoms in Level 1 lockdown (no park access)

7) Caution - findings are VERY preliminary and much work still to be done