Green spaces are great for our mental health

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New about this study is everywhere at the moment - in the [national newspapers](#) and on social media and of course, in the medical journal, [The Lancet](#). Not surprising really as mental health issues seem to cause more and more concern and according to this study, cost UK health services a huge €19·24 billion in 2010.

The research carried out by the Universities of Oxford and Hong Kong used high-resolution photography to focus on urban areas of 10 cities across the UK.

Background

The background to the study is described as 'Increased urbanisation and the associated reduced contact of individuals with natural environments have led to a rise in mental disorders, including depression. Residential greenness, a fundamental component of urban design, has been shown to reduce the public health burden of mental disorders. The present study investigates the association between residential green exposure and prevalence of major depressive disorders using a large and diverse cross-sectional dataset from the UK Biobank.'

The study was carried out using data collected over 18 months from April 2009 - October 2010 using a sample of almost 95,000 people. Resulting in a basic conclusion that 'natural neighbourhoods lined with trees, gardens, and flowering plants can be a green 'pill' for depression and anxiety.'

With acknowledgement that the world's urban population rises at an unprecedented rate, health professionals worldwide are grappling with the negative aspects of city living that contribute to poor physical and mental health. By 2030, 60 per cent of the world's population is expected to live in cities. This research will hopefully help medical professionals to predict 'health black spots to target groups most likely to be harmed.'

Not the same for all

One thing the study highlighted was that the effects of greenery weren't evenly shared. It seems greenery has a stronger protective impact for women, people under 60 and those living in poorer neighbourhoods.

Explanations for this can be that women are often primary carers for children or relatives and more likely to interact in green spaces. Similarly, younger people will often use green spaces during their leisure time as they are more active.

Occupants in lower income neighbourhoods are likely to be more stressed generally but this is where green areas could make a big difference. Similarly with older, less able people, they often don't get to make use of the green spaces. Addressing this could 'cut the risks of heart disease and respond o the demands of dementia'.

Additional information

This study used [UK Biobank data](#) in its investigations into green exposure and mental health. With permission of the participants (mostly adults aged 37–73 years), they analysed individual's incomes as a possible causal affect to mental health conditions; sociodemographics, lifestyle, and medical history through a series of touch-screen questionnaires; anthropometric measurements; biological sampling (blood, urine, and saliva); and imaging, and involved linkage with hospital-related outcomes. Individual-level, health-influencing, environment exposures were modelled within functional neighbourhoods for each participant. It also used aerial photography to assess greenery proximity