



ECEHH Research Insight:

Visiting nature and wellbeing in Wales

A bite size summary of research, September 2023

Analysis of data for Wales demonstrates that visiting nature is associated with lower socio-economic inequalities in well-being



Who is this relevant to?

Public health and environmental professionals, policy makers, and the environment/health research communities.

Background

Researchers from ECEHH and collaborators analysed data from the National Survey for Wales that had been anonymously linked to geographical data on local neighbourhood environments. The survey captured information on recreational visits to natural places, such as parks, woods and beaches. Well-being was measured using two standard scales, the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) and the ONS Life Satisfaction scale. Each individual was classified in terms of whether or not they were living in circumstances of material deprivation using a standard Welsh Government measure. The primary neighbourhood environment measure was 'greenness' as measured by the Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI). Analyses looked at whether a) living in a greener areas and b) spending more time visiting nature were related to well-being. They also explored whether the inequality in well-being between 'deprived' and 'not deprived' groups was tempered by exposure to nature.

Findings

The research was conducted in collaboration with the Universities of Liverpool, Swansea, Cardiff, the Barcelona Institute for Global Health and Natural Resources Wales, and was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

There were some unexpected findings indicating that greenness around the home of residents in Wales was actually associated with lower well-being.

But visits to natural environments were associated with better well-being. Importantly, amongst those people spending more time visiting nature, well-being inequality – the gap between people living in more and less deprived circumstances – was smaller.



Implications

These findings support those from other studies that suggest that opportunities to spend time in natural environments might, to some extent, buffer socio-economic inequalities in health and well-being.

While subject to certain limitations, there may be opportunities to capitalise on the benefits of natural environments to tackle the pervasive inequalities in health in the UK and internationally.



References

The full open access paper can be read here:

Garrett, J.K., Rowney, F.M., White, M.P. et al. Visiting nature is associated with lower socioeconomic inequalities in well-being in Wales. *Scientific Reports* 13, 9684 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-35427-7>

The GBS and Mental Health in Wales cohort was developed as part of independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), project number 16/07/07, and the UK Prevention Research Partnership, GroundsWell (MR/V049704/1). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

What is The European Centre for Environment & Human Health? ECEHH is a world leading, transdisciplinary research and education Centre informing the future health of the planet and people. As part of the University of Exeter Medical School, our research falls into two major areas: emerging threats to health and wellbeing posed by the environment, and the health and wellbeing benefits the natural environment can provide. We aim to break down boundaries separating human and planetary health, pioneering research to ensure local, national and global actions and policies are better informed by the needs of both. ecehh.org