Critical appraisal of: Nature contact, nature connectedness and associations with health, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours

Abstract

Contact with, and psychological connectedness to the natural world are both associated with various health and sustainability-related outcomes. To date, though, the evidence base has been fragmented. Using a representative sample of the adult population of England (N = 4,960), we investigated the relationships between three types of nature contact, psychological connectedness, health, subjective [wellbeing](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/wellbeing) and pro-environmental behaviours within a single study. We found that specific types of nature contact, as well as individual differences in nature connectedness, were differentially associated with aspects of health, well-being and pro-environmental behaviours. Living in a greener neighbourhood was, unrelated to any wellbeing or sustainability outcomes. By contrast, visiting nature ≥ once a week was positively associated with general health and household pro-environmental behaviours. Moreover, people who watched/listened to nature documentaries reported higher levels of both pro-environmental behaviours. Nature connectedness was positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing and both types of pro-environmental behaviour. Moreover, connectedness moderated key relationships between nature contact, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours. The complexity of our findings suggests that interventions increasing both contact with, and connection to nature, are likely to be needed in order to achieve synergistic improvements to human and planetary health. (Martin et al., 2020)

This cross-sectional study published in 2020 looks at a population of 4960 adults (2550 female) ages between 16-95 with an exposure of positive environmental behaviours which is referred to as nature contact and connectedness and the outcome of improved general health and wellbeing.

According to WHO, ‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.’ It is well known that people are spending less time outside and with the NHS under such a huge strain, this issue is clear, and this article clearly extends previous research that has been done on the nature benefits of health.

The data collected was over a 12 month period and over the whole of England to reduce bias (seasonal and geographical) and sampling bias was reduced by trying to ensure the sample was representative of England adding strength to the study as it can be applied to the population.

The primary outcomes measured were health and wellbeing by a quantitative scale and pro environmental behaviours within the last 12 months, the limitations of this way of collecting data were noted within the study. These outcomes were presented in a table.

Nature contact was split into Incidental contact (neighbourhood greenspace), Intentional contact (nature visits) and Indirect contact (Nature programmes TV/radio)and by using previous research ([Weinstein et al., 2015](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494419301185%22%20%5Cl%20%22bib73)) nature contact metrics were used.

The Nature Connection Index (NCI, [Hunt et al., 2017](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494419301185%22%20%5Cl%20%22bib28)) was used to evaluate nature connectedness as the level of internal reliability was deemed as good (α = .92 in the current study).

Covariates such as socio-economic status and neighbourhood deprivation were also mentioned.

The results of this study were presented in adjusted linear regression models which showed that increased nature contact and connectedness positively impacted outcomes in general health, wellbeing, and sustainability generally however, there were 3 exceptions of this:

1. no correlation between greenspace and general health
2. no correlation between nature programmes and evaluative wellbeing
3. There was a small negative correlation between general health and nature programs.

Simply living near greenspaces wasn’t enough to positively impact general health however making an intentional visit to greenspaces had a greater impact showing the importance of intention of nature positive behaviours. The frequency of visit was shown to be unrelated to outcomes apart from where individuals felt less connected to nature, this relates to the interventional study ([Richardson, McEwan, & Garip, 2018](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494419301185%22%20%5Cl%20%22bib56)) where the most benefit from engaging in nature came from those with lower initial nature connectedness.

It was shown that nature visits were associated with positive environmental behaviours within households such as recycling.

There was an interesting idea when looking at indirect contact such as watching nature programs which showed a negative correlation. However, another study was mentioned which results showed a link between watching more TV was associated with worse wellbeing, therefore more research would need to be done to draw a clear conclusion on this.

Overall, this study looked at a population which is representative and therefore can be applied locally. The results add to previous research on this topic. The costs of this study were outweighed by the benefits of the results and looked at some vital outcomes which impact each person every day. We are always striving for a quick fix or the next thing that we believe will give us health, but this study shows that this needs to start by nourishing our environment around us.

References

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