

# Green Spaces May Boost Well-Being for City Slickers

April 22, 2013

People who live in urban areas with more green space tend to report greater well-being than city dwellers who don't have parks, gardens, or other green space nearby, according to new [research](#) published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

Examining data from a national longitudinal survey of households in the United Kingdom, Mathew White and colleagues at the European Centre for Environment & Human Health at the University of Exeter Medical School found that individuals reported less mental distress and higher life satisfaction when they were living in greener areas. And this association held even after the researchers accounted for changes in participants' income, employment, marital status, physical health, and housing type.

White and colleagues were surprised by the scale of the effects of living in a greener area in comparison to 'big hitting' life events, such as marriage and employment:

"Living in an urban area with relatively high levels of green space compared to one with relatively low levels of green space was associated with a positive impact on well-being equivalent to roughly a third of the impact of being married vs. unmarried and a tenth of the impact of being employed vs. unemployed."

The results show that, even stacked up against other factors that contribute to life satisfaction, living in a greener area had a significant effect.

"These kinds of comparisons are important for policymakers when trying to decide how to invest scarce public resources, e.g. for park development or upkeep, and figuring out what 'bang' they'll get for their buck," says White.

Findings from previous research suggested a correlation between green space and well-being, but those studies weren't able to rule out the possibility that people with higher levels of well-being simply move to greener areas. White and colleagues were able to solve that problem by using longitudinal data from the national survey; that data were collected annually from over 10,000 people between 1991 and 2008.

The new research does not prove that moving to a greener area will necessarily cause increased happiness, but it does fit with findings from experimental studies showing that short bouts of time in a green space can improve people's mood and cognitive functioning.

While the effect for any one person might be small, White points out that the potential positive effects of green space for society at large might be substantial.

"This research could be important for psychologists, public health officials and urban planners who are interested in learning about the effects that urbanization and city planning can have on population health

and well-being,” White concludes.

White describes his research in this brief video from the European Centre for Environment & Human Health: <http://www.ecehh.org/publication/would-you-be-happier-living-greener-urban-area>

Co-authors on this research include Ian Alcock, Benedict Wheeler, and Michael Depledge of the University of Exeter.

This research was supported by the European Regional Developmental Fund and the European Social Fund Convergence Programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.