

White, Victoria (2019) Out in the open: an examination of the physical and psychological affordances of outdoor spaces within the delivery of formal therapy. In: Valuing Nature Annual Conference 2019, 28-29 October 2019, Royal Society, London, UK. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5265/>

*Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.*

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

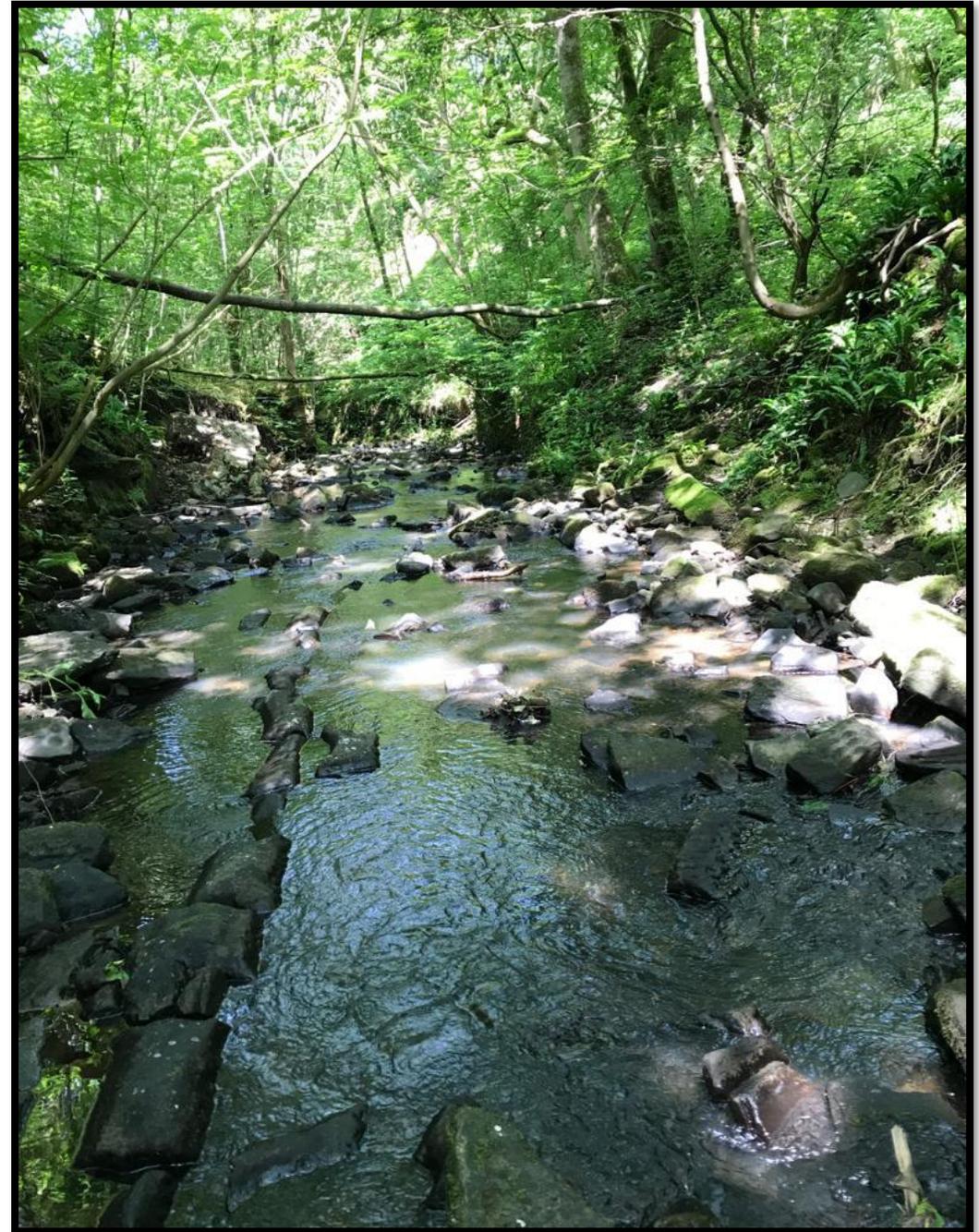
- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

**Out in the Open: An Examination  
of the Physical and Psychological  
Affordances of Outdoor Spaces  
within the Delivery of Formal  
Therapy**

**Victoria Louise White  
PhD Candidate  
Department of Science, Natural Resources and Outdoor Studies  
University of Cumbria  
Ambleside Campus**



# Overview

- **Mental Health within the United Kingdom**
- **Mental Health within Young People**
- **Theoretical Background**
- **My Research Brief**
- **Overall Research Aims**
- **Theoretical Framework: Ecological Dynamics**
- **Study One**
- **Findings**
- **Future Research**

# Mental Health within the United Kingdom

## Common Mental Disorders

Latest information – published 2016

Source: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (2014)

Survey runs every 7 years, collects data on poor mental health among adults (16 and over)

Common Mental Disorders – different types of depression and anxiety causing marked emotional distress and interfering with daily function

- One adult in six surveyed reported a common mental disorder
- One woman in five, one man in eight
- One person in three reporting a common mental disorder reported current use of mental health treatment
- Demographic inequalities in treatment: people who were white British, female or in mid life (35-54 especially) most likely to receive treatment

(McManus, Bebbington, Jenkins & Brugha, 2016)

## Suicide

Latest statistics – published September 2019

- In 2018: 6,859 suicides in UK and Republic of Ireland (6,507) in UK
- Men three times more likely to die by suicide than women
- In the UK, suicide rates among young people have been increasing in recent years
- Suicide rate for young females now at its highest on record
- Suicide is the biggest killer of young people (15-24 years)
- In 2018, 759 young people took their own life in the UK and Republic of Ireland

(Samaritans, 2019)

# Mental Health within Young People

- 1 in 6 young people (aged 16-24) have symptoms of a common mental disorder (McManus, Bebbington, Jenkins & Brugha, 2016)
- Almost half (46.8%) of 17-19 year olds with a diagnosable mental health disorder have self-harmed or attempted suicide (52.7% for young women) (NHS Digital, 2018).
- Among males and females aged 5 to 19 years, suicide and injury or poisoning of undetermined intent was the leading cause of death in 2017. This has increased since 2016, increase especially notable for females (13.3% of deaths at this age, 9.6% in 2016) (Office for National Statistics, 2017).
- Non-attendance common problem in child and adolescent mental health services (Michelson & Day, 2014)
- Adolescents less likely to seek help than adults for mental health difficulties (Collins, Westra, Dozois & Burns, 2004)

# Theoretical Background

**Stress Reduction Theory:** Human stress levels can be reduced by mere exposure to natural settings (Ulrich, 1979, 1981, 1984; Ulrich, Walker & Tassinary, 2003; Kweon, Ulrich, Walker & Tassinary, 2008)

**Attention Restoration Theory:** People respond to natural stimuli with involuntary attention and fascination. This has a restorative effect on mental fatigue (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan and Talbot, 1983; Hartig, Mang & Evans, 1991; Hartig et al., 2003)

**The Biophilia Hypothesis:** Proposes that people have a fundamental need for affiliation with other life and life-like processes within the natural world (Wilson, 1984; Kellert & Wilson, 1993)

**Therapeutic Landscapes:** Examines the connection between place and well-being and considers how specific places may have healing qualities (Gesler, 1992; Gesler, 2003)

**Nature Deficit Disorder:** Lack of contact with the natural world can lead to a range of behavioural problems. (Diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, obesity, higher rates of emotional and physical illness) (Louv, 2005; Children & Nature Network, 2019)

# My Research Brief

*“Explore the impacts of green and blue spaces as alternatives to traditional therapeutic landscapes used within formal counselling or psychotherapy”*

# Overall Research Aims

- **Examine** how the process of formal therapy may change when delivered in an outdoor setting through an examination of the physical and psychological affordances the setting may provide.
- **Identify** and **examine** the unique constraints which can be present in an outdoor setting such as issues with health and safety, confidentiality, and client privacy and how they may be overcome.
- **Investigate** whether the setting appears to attract any client groups who may be less represented when examining engagement with formal therapy in indoor settings, in particular, males and young people.

# Theoretical Framework: Ecological Dynamics

➤ **Ecological Psychology**  
(Gibson, 1979)

➤ **Dynamical Systems Theory**  
(Clarke & Crossland, 1985)

➤ **Constraints Theory**  
(Newall, 1986)



(Adapted from: Davids, Button & Bennett, 2008: p 40.)

# **Study 1: “What Makes a Space a ‘Healing Place’. An Examination of Settings for Counselling and Psychotherapy within the United Kingdom.**

- How many therapists deliver therapy outdoors?
- The types of settings indoor and outdoor therapists use
- Key factors which influence choice of indoor/outdoor setting
- Description of indoor settings e.g. natural features – light, plants, fish tank etc
- Description of outdoor settings e.g. are certain landscapes more suitable?
- How the environment affects the setting e.g. trees/light
- Types of therapy being offered outdoors
- Feelings toward outdoor therapy among clients & therapists
- Perceived benefits & barriers to commencing the delivery of therapy outdoors
- Therapist’s perceptions of ease of availability of outdoor therapy locally
- Connectedness to Nature Scale (Mayer & Frantz, 2004)
- New Ecological Paradigm Scale (Dunlap et al, 2000)

# Findings

- Online questionnaire
- 212 participants
- Indoor settings only ( $n = 174$ ) 82.1%
- Indoor & outdoor settings ( $n = 36$ ) 16.9%
- Outdoors only = ( $n = 2$ ) 0.94%
- Total number of therapists using some form of outdoor therapy (  $n = 38$ ) 17.8%

# Findings

## Constraints

- Heightened awareness of confidentiality in public space
- UK Weather
- Insurance
- What if we meet someone we know.
- Time constraints - fitting it in with other clients.
- Safety - Will I be ok outside with the person I'm walking with.

# Findings

## Affordances

- May suit those who feel intimidated face to face.
- Lends itself to metaphor
- Added exercise which stimulates endorphins which helps boost mood.
- Green space somehow encourages an opening up of thoughts/creativity/hopefulness.
- Gives a sense of achievement by building in a walk/exercise

# Findings

**“Clients experiencing depression have moved to Walk & Talk Therapy after conversations about the benefits of being outside, amongst nature etc”**

**“It feels particularly freeing to work in a setting away from the norms and pressures of People. To give space to the animal in us: distinct, but not separate from the Civilised, Socialised part. It gives us - client and myself - the space to contemplate our role/roles in life; belonging; grounding; to feel connected. The challenge then is, of course, to work to integrate this feeling and deeper knowing back in our lives in the World of People”**

**“Clients entering therapy for the first time who have felt uneasy sitting face to face, have preferred Walk & Talk to start with - less eye contact required - but then moved to traditional therapy room style sessions in time”**

# **Future Research**

**Further studies will include semi-structured interviews with counsellors, psychotherapists and clients across the United Kingdom and the undertaking of a case study in an applied setting. The thesis hopes to address a research gap which currently exists in relation to a consideration of the physical and psychological affordances and constraints which may arise with the delivery of therapy in outdoor settings as opposed to traditional indoor settings.**

# References

Children and Nature Network (2019) *Nature Deficit Disorder*. Available at: <https://www.childrenandnature.org/about/nature-deficit-disorder/>

Clarke, D., & Crossland, J. (1985). *Action Systems: An Introduction to the Analysis of Complex Behaviour*. London: Methuen.

Collins, K.A., Westra, H.A., Dozois, D.J.A. & Burns, D.D. (2004) Gaps in accessing treatment for anxiety and depression: challenges for the delivery of care. *Clinical Psychology Review*; 24 (5): 583–616.

Davids, K., Button, C. & Bennett, S. (2008). *Dynamics of Skill Acquisition: A Constraints-Led Approach*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics

Gesler, W. M. (1992). 'Therapeutic Landscapes: Medical Issues in Light of the New Cultural Geography'. *Social Science & Medicine* 34, no. 7: 735–46. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(92\)90360-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(92)90360-3)

Gesler, W. M. (2003). *Healing Places*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gibson, J.J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hartig, T., Evans, G.W., Jamner, I.D., Davis, D.S. and Garling, T. (2003). Tracking restoration in natural and urban field settings. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23, 109-123.

Hartig, T., Mang, M. and Evans, G.W. (1991). Restorative Effects of Natural Environment Experience. *Environment and Behaviour*, 23, 3-26.

Kaplan, R. and Kaplan, S. (1989). *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaplan, S. and Talbot, J.F. (1983). Psychological benefits of a wilderness experience. In I. Altman and J.F. Wohlwill, Eds, *Human Behaviour and Environment*. New York: Plenum Press, Vol 6, *Behaviour and The Natural Environment*, 163-203.

Kellert, S.R. and Wilson, E.O. (eds) (1993) *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Kweon, B.S., Ulrich, R.S., Walker, V.D. and Tassinary, L.G. (2008). Anger and stress: The role of landscape posters in an office setting. *Environment and Behaviour*, 40 (3): 355-381.

# References

Louv, R. (2005). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books

McManus, S., Bebbington, P., Jenkins, R., Brugha T. (eds.) (2016) *Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014*. Leeds: NHS Digital.

Michelson, D., & Day, C. Improving Attendance at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for Families from Socially Disadvantaged Communities: Evaluation of a Pre-Intake Engagement Intervention in the UK. *Administration & Policy in Mental Health & Mental Health Services Research*. 2014;41(2):252-261. doi:10.1007/s10488-012-0462-4.

Newell, K.M. (1986). Constraints on the development of coordination. In M.G. Wade & H.T.A. Whiting (Eds), *Motor development in children: Aspects of coordination and control* (pp.341-360). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff

NHS Digital (2018) '*Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017*' Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017>

Office for National Statistics (2017) '*Deaths registered in England and Wales*' Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregisteredinenglandandwalesseriesdr/2017#suicide-accounted-for-an-increased-proportion-of-deaths-at-ages-5-to-19-years-in-2017>

Samaritans (2019) *Suicide Statistics Report: Latest Statistics for the UK and Republic of Ireland*. Retrieved from: [https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwrrXtBRCKARIsAMbU6bEYyWIV3pbSXGY4AKdBNSyG9cY7vpjHBo2mLmTynr\\_y\\_f1wno4cesMaAILJELw\\_wcB](https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwrrXtBRCKARIsAMbU6bEYyWIV3pbSXGY4AKdBNSyG9cY7vpjHBo2mLmTynr_y_f1wno4cesMaAILJELw_wcB)

Ulrich, R.S. (1979). Visual Landscapes and Psychological Well-Being. *Landscape Research* 4, (1):17-23.

Ulrich, R.S. (1984). View through a window may influence recovery from surgery. *Science*, 224: 1-3.

Ulrich, R.S., (1981). Nature versus urban scenes: Some psycho physiological effects. *Environment and Behaviour*, 13 (5):523–556.

Ulrich, R.S., Simon, R.F. and Miles, M. (2003). Effects of environmental simulations and television on blood donor stress. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 20 (1): 38-47

Wilson, E.O. (1984). *Biophilia: The human bond with other species*. Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press.