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## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

### Exposure to green spaces may strengthen resilience and support mental health in the face of the covid-19 pandemic

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Mughal and colleagues provide a useful overview of mental health support during the covid-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Outdoor recreation in green spaces has emerged during the present pandemic as an essential tool to combat distress.<sup>2,3</sup> The mental health benefits of exposure to green spaces has been documented extensively before.<sup>4</sup> Here we briefly demonstrate that such exposure may restore and improve aspects of resilience and complement other means of mental health support, such as that offered by GPs.

Firstly, exposure to green spaces facilitates recovery from physiological stress, restoration of directed attention, and improvement of cognitive performance. This aids in strengthening mental resilience by dampening the body's stress response, allowing for a more mindful thinking style and supporting adaptive thinking styles.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, green spaces may stimulate physical activity and improve physical resilience. Thirdly, purposeful or pro-environmental behaviour and the anticipation of seeing interesting species (birds or orchids, for example) may activate positive emotions and improve emotional resilience. And finally, gathering outdoors, even at a safe distance, improves social cohesion and helps people to feel connected to the outside world, thus reinforcing social resilience.

To unlock the potential of green spaces for human health, it is recommended that they are more explicitly included in public health and spatial planning policies, and that prescribed exposure to green spaces is more often used to complement mental health management in primary care, now and post-covid-19. In highly urbanised and densely populated regions, however, natural areas are usually too small to accommodate increasing recreational pressure without jeopardising their biodiversity. As the mental health benefits of green spaces often depend more on perceived biodiversity than true species richness,<sup>6</sup> we argue that pressure on nature could be alleviated by greening and improving recreation infrastructure in cities and rural landscapes. Investing in natural resilience is investing in human resilience.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: [www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1064/rr-0](http://www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1064/rr-0).

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