

## Mental health and wellbeing; Ecotherapy

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**Abstract** – Humans' need for nature is linked not just to the material exploitation of the environment but also to the influence of the natural world on our emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual development. It has been shown that green areas have a positive impact on human health as a result of both physical activity and use as a site for mental relaxation and stimulation. Ecotherapy is a natural, free and accessible alternative treatment for our mental health. Ecotherapy is one of the ecosystem services provided by nature and is based on ecopsychological theories. In general terms, it is an area of improvement based on the concept of ecology, aiming to be holistic in theory and practice. In the most basic sense, ecotherapy is related to the healing and psychological benefits of being in nature and natural environments. In a modern context, the relationship between nature and the positive effects on mental health goes back to the beginning of the last century.

In the scope of this study; parameters and priorities for the identification of "green space" as well as "mental health" to examine how I defined it is important to identify and literature form the basis of it. The green area includes urban areas with lawns, trees or other plantation designated for recreational or aesthetic purposes. These areas are open spaces, including public, parks, public gardens, open public spaces, green roads / paths, green roofs and green corridors.

Based on research and literature review; Ecotherapy supports the theoretical benefits derived from human and natural environment interactions. Thus, it seems rather obvious that:

- Being in nature affects health (physical and mental) positively.
- Based on nature interaction; It is observed that nature-based activities have a positive effect on human health.
- It is clear that, this service provided by nature (for example, the presence of therapeutic or developmental services in Nature) is an unforgettable value, if it is unforgettable in the ecological literature, in relation to intermediate and recent ecosystem goods and services in the ecological literature, without direct cost.

In this study; The effects of nature on human mental health have been extensively studied. The definition of the concept of ecotherapy, the types of ecotherapy and the possibilities within this scope were evaluated. Based on the data obtained, suggestions have been developed within the scope of ecotherapy as an alternative healing method.

**Keywords**– Ecotherapy, open-green spaces, gardening, nature, healthy

### I. INTRODUCTION

Ecotherapy is a natural, free and accessible treatment that boosts our mental wellbeing. Whether it's a horticultural development programme supervised by a therapist or simple walk in the park, being outdoors and being active is proven to benefit our mental health. There is plenty of evidence to show that regular contact with the natural environment enhances both physical health and mental wellbeing. This body of research has looked at our interaction with a wide variety of outdoor settings – from open countryside and remote wild lands, through parks and open spaces, to trees, allotments and gardens in urban areas. The consistent message from all this research is that contact with green space improves psychological health and mental wellbeing. It reduces stress and improves mood. It provides a restorative environment for people to relax, unwind and recharge their batteries. It facilitates social contact and brings people together. In its most basic sense, ecotherapy is about the healing and psychological benefits of being in nature and natural settings. In a modern context the links between nature and positive effects on mental

health can be traced back to the early part of the last century [1].

#### *-Effects of green areas on ecotherapy*

It is argued, however, that open green spaces are of a strategic importance for the quality of life of our increasingly urbanized society. Increasing empirical evidence, in fact, indicates that the presence of natural assets (i.e. urban parks and forests, green belts) and components (i.e. trees, water) in urban contexts contributes to the quality of life in many ways. Besides important environmental services such as air and water purification, wind and noise filtering, or microclimate stabilization, natural areas provide social and psychological services, which are of crucial significance for the livability of modern cities and the well being of urban dwellers. A natural experience (interact with animals, plants, landscapes or wilderness) may reduce stress [2], enhance contemplativeness, rejuvenate the city dweller, and provide a sense of peacefulness and tranquility [3].

### *-Quantity of Green Space*

The amount of green space per person, the design of hard roads, the functional and aesthetic quality of green areas within their boundaries and its usability are important for the ecological habitable level of the city. The green space per capita is considered to be  $m^2$  and this is the value obtained by dividing the amount of green space in the city by the urban population [4]. 1.2 square meters per capita green space in urban areas in Turkey falls open. For example, Ankara is 2.2 square meters in the city scale, 1 square meter in Istanbul, 2.3 square meters in Izmir and 1.2 square meters in Eskişehir. On the other hand, the open-green space norm at the city level in America is generally considered to be 40 square meters per person, provided that the urban density is 250 persons / ha (400 square meters for 10 people). In cities like Newyork, Paris, Copenhagen, more than 40 square meters per person ([5], [4])

### *-Types of ecotherapy*

All kinds of ecotherapy activities aim to improve your mental health and wellbeing. For example, can be listed as follows

- Green exercise therapy – physical activities in green spaces, e.g. walking, run by a group leader.
- Environmental conservation – taking part in the conservation and protection of natural spaces.
- Social and therapeutic horticulture (STH) – spending time gardening or growing food in allotments or gardens.
- Care farming (on rural or urban farms) – this can include looking after farm animals, growing crops and woodland management.
- Nature arts and crafts – art-based activities in the natural environment, or that use natural materials such as wood, grass and clay. Many ecotherapy projects will include elements of arts and crafts within their programmes.
- Animal assisted therapy (AAT) – a formal therapy using guided contact with animals, such as horses or dogs.
- Animal assisted interventions (AAI) – being in spaces where you will come into contact with animals for their therapeutic benefits.
- Wilderness therapy – allows you to challenge yourself in a wilderness or a remote setting.
- Ecotherapy (in its strict sense) – is about building a relationship with nature, so that personal wellbeing is considered equally alongside the health of the environment. Sessions usually include some type of formal therapy, such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) or counselling [6].

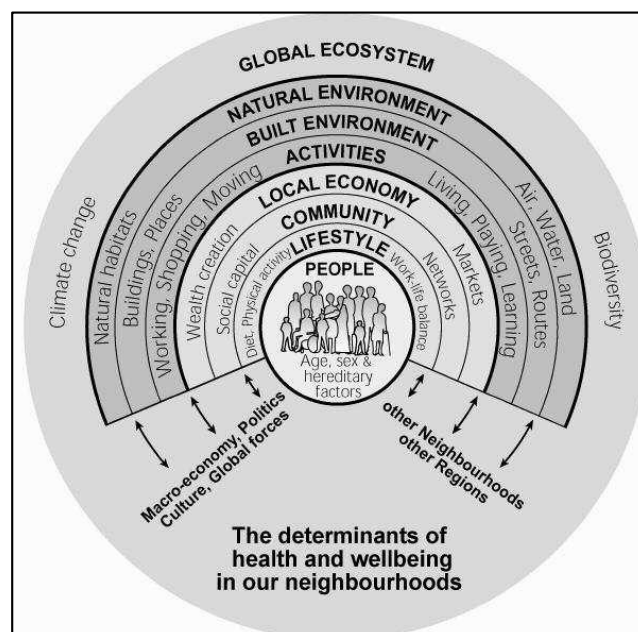


Figure 1: The determinants of health and well-being in our neighbourhoods [7].

### *-Ecotherapy for improve mental health*

Nature and open-green spaces can re-establish a bond with your own peace of mind. Also it has some health benefits as;

- reduce stress levels
- reduce depression
- improve self-esteem
- make opportunity to meet different people
- provide a variety of interesting activities
- increases flexibility
- make a positive contribution to the environment
- Connecting with People
- Connecting with Nature

### *-Houseplants as an Alternative Form of Ecotherapy*

Limited research has been conducted on the possible therapeutic benefit of houseplants due to the deeply rooted notion that nature and the outdoors are synonymous. Current research on this topic has struggled with issues of external validity due to the heterogeneity present among participants and plants in true experiment-based research samples [8]. The lack of external validity is present when following a meta-analysis of available selected research, which could not conclusively say whether or not plants have a positive effect on study participants. At worst, the research has pointed out that houseplants have a neutral effect on the well-being of participants [8].

Table 1: Important Principles describing why people enjoy green exercise activities [9].

Principles	Subcategories	Descriptors
1. Natural and social connections	a. Social	Being with friends and family, companionship and social interaction, creation of collective identity, making new friends, conviviality.
	b. Animals and wildlife	Direct bonding with pets (eg, dogs and horses) and wild animals (eg, birdwatching).
	c. Memories and knowledge	Visiting special places where memories and stories are evoked and recalled (childhood associations), story-telling, personal identity, links to myths, stimulation of imagination, ecological literacy.
	d. Spiritual	Large scale and longevity of nature in contrast to humans, transformative capacity of green nature, oneness with nature.
2. Sensory stimulation	a. Colours and sounds	Diverse colours of nature and landscapes, views of landscape, beauty of scenery, bird-song and sounds of other animals, light (especially sunrise / sunset), visual and aesthetic appreciation of landscapes.
	b. Fresh air	Smell and other senses, being outdoors, exposed to all types of weather, changing of seasons, a contrast to indoor and city life, escape from urban pollution.
	c. Excitement	Adrenalin rush, exhilaration, fun, arising from a physical activity or experience of risk (eg, rock-climbing), sense of adventure.
3. Activity	a. Manual tasks	Learning a skill and completing a manual task (eg, conservation activity), challenging, fulfilling and rewarding, sense of achievement, leading to a sense of worth and value.
	b. Physical activity	Enjoyment of the activity itself and the physical and mental health benefits associated with it, makes people feel good, more energetic, less lethargic.
4. Escape	a. Escape from modern life	Getting away from modern life, relaxing (as a contrast), time alone or with family, a time to think and clear the head, peace and quiet, tranquillity and freedom, privacy, escape from pressure, stress and the 'rat-race', recharging batteries.

## II. CONCLUSION

The use of ecotherapy is a unique and alternative model, which broadens the scope of mental health promotion, practice and education. The positive emotions and social benefits deriving from the connection or reconnection with nature capture outcomes which are alas still outside the repertoire of so many practitioners [10].

[7]; The practice of ecotherapy seems to have a definitive “mutuality” that can support collective behavioural change. [11] talks of behavioural interventions that tend to “be more successful where there is an equal relationship between the influencer and the influenced and where both parties stand to gain from the outcome”. In public mental health, such mutuality can be seen in the relationships between practitioners and service users, where the latter assume greater responsibility towards personal behaviour change. In ecotherapeutic approaches, there seems to be a further level of mutuality: the role of the influencer is adopted by people who would normally be classed as the influenced. In benefiting from personal lifestyle changes and

associated recovery, the service users help to develop a framework for reciprocity towards the environment and the community. In doing so, the community is influenced to care for and respect the environment and, in addition, to see their local green spaces as a source of health and well-being.

People have been living intertwined with nature until their modern age. In the modern era of industrialization, crowded concrete-covered urban environments forced people to break with their nature, and this caused considerable damage to the inner world. For this reason, the most effective way to solve the problems that people experience in their inner world is recalling nature; it is part of its re-learning and integration with nature.

The fact that people associated with nature, to establish contact, studies examining the relationship between the treatment of psychological disorders in Turkey is very limited. However, the number of such studies is increasing day by day in developed countries and it is considered as an important indicator in relation with nature, psychological improvement and treatment sessions. Ekotherapy with the concept of comprehensive studies in psychology in the treatment process in Turkey must be addressed. For this reason, the response of the patients to the green tissue in the natural areas, the process of recovery after the eco-therapy and the level of happiness can be determined.

In the context of this subject, various ecotherapy activities should be organized and people should be informed.

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