

## Ageing Well Public Talk Series 2024/25

### Talk 4. *Access to learning and nature: addressing health inequalities.*

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Slide 3: Talk 4. Access to learning and nature: addressing health inequalities.

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Image: Word cloud of words relating to 'ageing'.

Logos: The Open University and Catalyst Health Solutions.

Slide 4: *Access to learning and nature: addressing health inequalities.*

**Yoseph Araya**, Senior Lecturer in Ecology & Environmental Sciences

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Image: Adults and children in a nature setting, observing a collection of natural items such as leaves and twigs.

Slide 5: *Today's talk*

We are going to consider the relationship between health inequalities, learning and access to nature, including:

- The link between health and nature
- Why some groups experience less benefit from nature
- How this can impact cognitive function and learning
- Actions we can take
- Case studies

Image: Word cloud of words relating to 'ageing'.

Slide 6: *The main drivers of our health*

Public Health England - Place-based approaches for reducing health inequalities

Diagram: Describing the main drivers of health.

- Central icon representing people.
- Counterclockwise from top left: Health and Wellbeing
- Wider determinants of health
  - Income and debt
  - Employment / quality of work
  - Education and skills
  - Housing
  - Natural and built environment
  - Access to goods / services
  - Power and discrimination

- Psycho-social factors
  - Isolation
  - Social support
  - Social networks
  - Self-esteem and self-worth
  - Perceived level of control
  - Meaning / purpose of life
- Health behaviours
  - Smoking
  - Diet
  - Alcohol
- Physiological impacts
  - High blood pressure
  - High cholesterol
  - Anxiety / depression

#### Slide 7: Health benefits of nature

Diagram: Circular cycle - Social connection, Improved mental wellbeing, Preventing ill health

There is various evidence of these benefits: Rhee et al. (2023); Bratman et al.(2012); Kuo et al (2019)

These benefits are compounded by learning about them, creating a virtuous cycle of wellbeing.

Icons from left to right: Magnifying glass with an insect, heart shape with heart beat graph inside, human lungs, connected people, head with cogs inside, tree.

#### Slide 8: Forest schools

Image: Forest school in Toronto (1912) – encouraging learning through engagement with nature. Black and white photo of adults and children sat in a circle on a woodland floor.

<https://www.periscope.uk/research/atlas/outdoor-learning>

#### Slide 9: What are the benefits of nature

**Ecosystem services** are benefits provided by our environment, ranging from resource, ecological, economical to social and to the cultural. Arrow pointing from previous sentence to the word 'Wellbeing'.

Images clockwise from top left:

- Image 1: A garden with raised beds. Caption: Producing food. Source ©NSF
- Image 2: An insect collecting pollen from a flower. Caption: Pollination. Source ©Andrew Mandemaker, Wikipedia.
- Image 3: Moorland landscape with water in the foreground. Caption: Water reservoir. Source ©OLU, Wikipedia.
- Image 4: Palace Park, Austria - Lakeside view of park with Leopoldine temple in the background. Caption: Cultural value. Source ©showaze, Pixabay.

#### Slide 10: Nature and health trends

Article screenshots:

- American Psychological Association website. April/May 2020 Feature article, 'Nurtured by nature'.

- Mind website. Article title 'Nature and mental health'.
- The Guardian website. Article title 'Health benefits from being in nature worth £356 an adult in 2020, ONS data shows'.
- World Health Organisation (WHO) website. Article title 'Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment'.

#### Slide 11: How nature helps cognitive function and learning

- Nature exposure
  - Free play in nature
  - Nature walks
  - Camp experiences
  - Wilderness adventure Nature centre programs
  - Nature-based preschools
  - Nature-based curricula
  - Outdoor classes and schools
  - Classroom views
  - Vegetation around early childhood institutions, schools and homes
  - School gardens
  - Animal-assisted learning
- The learner
  - More able to concentrate
  - Less stressed
  - More self-disciplined
  - More engaged
  - More physically active, fit
- The learning context
  - Calmer, quieter, safer social context
  - Warmer, more cooperative social context
  - Autonomy and "loose parts"
- Learning outcome
  - Academic Achievement
    - Increased retention of subject matter content
    - Higher standardised test scores
    - Better grades
    - Better reading, math, writing skills
    - Higher graduation rates
  - Personal Development
    - Better leadership skills
    - Better communication skills
    - More resilience
    - Better critical thinking and problem solving
    - Better spatial skills
  - Stewardship
    - Stronger connection to nature
    - Stronger environmental values
    - More pro-environmental behaviours

### Slide 12: Why focus on nature now

There is **increasing appreciation and utilisation** of green spaces by various stakeholders and for various activities: learning, worship, sports, entertainment, food production etc.

**Nature loss is a major problem** from habitat destruction, overexploitation & now climate emergency.

We need nature to **mitigate climate change**, provide food and resources and wellbeing.

*Our dependency in nature is a given, yet human disconnect is highly concerning.*

Image: Forest, Sunrise, Deforestation image. Source ©Bernhard\_Schuermann, Pixabay,

### Slide 13: Disconnection from nature

Disconnection from nature is “**the lack of awareness or disregard** for human identity in material elements and within flows, energy and other nonmaterial elements and values that constitute nature.

We assert that this disconnection can be traced to many factors, such as ideological orientations, political relations, sociocultural norms and institutional arrangements that prevent awareness or create disregard for people as part of nature.”

Beery et al. (2023) People and Nature.

*We need to create awareness to overcome this and creating engagement.*

Circular diagram:

- Centre section:
  - Disconnection from Nature
  - Meaning making process
  - Individual
  - Social
- First ring:
  - Philosophical
  - Sociocultural
  - Institutional
  - Political
  - Material
  - Experiential
  - Cognitive
  - Emotional
- Outer ring:
  - Anthropocentric human / nature decoupling
  - Diverging nature perception
  - Exclusion (outsidedness)
  - Cultural norm dominance
  - Dangerous unsafe
  - Discrimination
  - Displacement
  - Recognisable injustice
  - Procedural inequalities
  - Distributional inequalities

- Lack of access
- Grey infrastructure
- Food deserts
- Telecoupling
- Zoonotic, pathogens
- Nature deficit disorder
- VR experiences
- Extinction of experience
- Societal extinction of species
- Ecological illiteracy
- Loss of biocultural memory
- Lack of outdoor code of conduct
- Solastalgia
- Biophobia, fear and disgust
- Distanced or indifference
- Alienation from nature

#### Slide 14: What are health inequalities?

- Health inequalities are **unfair and avoidable** differences in health status between different groups of people.
- Inequalities in health are recognised by differences in length of life and the number of years spent in good health.

Bar chart: Depicting male life expectancy in relation to levels of deprivation during two periods of time (2011-2013 & 2016-2018). The trend shows that life expectancy of males during these period are lowest amongst the most deprived and highest for the least deprived.

England data - Produced by the Institute of Health Equity

#### Slide 15: Inequalities in access to & experience of nature

Image: A park with open spaces, trees and pathways.

Five icons: a pound sign, bus, a wheelchair user, hand with a diagonal line crossing it, adult with a child.

#### Slide 16: Addressing inequality – call to action

##### **Actions**

- Commitment to provision – enshrine in law
- Enable, empower, change, social movement
- Green NHS locally
- Provide access to resources for learning

To **engage** effectively with nature:

- Learn about nature
- Go out and experience it
- Meet people and talk in greenspaces
- Work with societies and interested bodies

*Action needs at governance, civil society and public level*

Diagram: The five pathways to nature connection.

- Senses

- Emotions
- Compassion
- Meaning
- Beauty

Slide 17: You don't need wilderness to access nature

Diagram: Centre: Urbanspaces. Outer branches clockwise from top left:

- Parks
- Playing fields, playgrounds
- Allotments, community orchards
- Meadows, woodland
- Ponds, lakes, rivers
- Botanic gardens

Since Victorian times public parks in urban areas have been around since 1840's, designed to create physically healthy spaces and for walking and promenading.

Slide 18: Case study 1: an intergenerational in-person community

Logo: Dadima's CIC

Image: Walkers from Dadima's CIC, and scientists from the Open University, in a hay meadow.

Credit: Sivi Sivanesan. Source – 'Talking hay in the sun shines' article

<https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/per/?p=8586>. Photo credit: Sivi Sivanesan

Slide 19: Case Study 3: Milton Keynes and The Parks Trust

Established as an independent charity in 1992, cares for MK's ancient woodlands, lakes, river valleys for ever, for everyone.

The Parks Trust, Milton Keynes

- >2500 ha
- 25% of urban area
- > £140 million endowment

Image 1: Map of Milton Keynes. © The Parks Trust, MK

Image 2: Campbell park, Milton Keynes. © The Parks Trust, MK

Image 3: North Loughton Valley Park, Milton Keynes. Concrete Cows artwork, 1978 by Liz Leyh (replica replacements by Bill Billings). © The Parks Trust, MK

Image 4: Sheep grassing in Campbell Park, Milton Keynes. © The Parks Trust, MK

Logo: The Parks Trust Milton Keynes

Slide 20: Key takeaways

- Nature has a range of benefits for health and environmental stewardship
- Access to experience of nature means some groups do not benefit as much
- There are things we can all do to engage more with nature

Slide 21: Further resources

- <https://findingnature.org.uk/2017/05/10/beyond-knowing-nature/>
- <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/addressing-health-inequalities-greenspaces-age-well-part-i-socio-economic-and-transport-access-inequalities>

- <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/addressing-health-inequalities-greenspaces-age-well-part-ii-diversity-and-safety>

Slide 22: Ageing Well series of Public Talks

- Dr Jitka Vseteckova (pictured), Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Care
- “Being mindful of eating well, hydration, physical activity, learning new things and social connections can delay the decline caused by ageing. Come and join us for the series of public talks with the title Ageing Well”

Slide 23: Summary of related resources to The Ageing Well Public Talk Series

Podcasts

- Vseteckova J & King J (2020) COVID-19 Interview podcast for The Retirement Café: [‘Ageing Well Under Lockdown’](#)
- Vseteckova J & Broad E (2020) Podcast – Open University & The Parks Trust [Keep Me Walking - researching with people living with dementia and their carers](#) –
- Vseteckova J (2020) Podcast - [Areas of research with The Open University](#)
- Broad E, Methley A & Vseteckova J (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust - [Spotter sheet and mindful walking](#).
- Vseteckova J, Methley A, Broad E (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust [Preventing brain decline while ageing](#)

Slide 24:

- Methley A, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust [Walking therapy](#)
- Vseteckova J, Methley A, Broad (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust [Understanding our memory](#)
- Araya Y, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2022) [Engaging with our environment](#)
- Joannidi H, Araya Y, Broad E & Vseteckova J (2022) [Sense of self during aging: how mindfulness and nature can help](#)
- The above podcasts can be also seen on [The Parks Trust YouTube Channel](#)

Slide 25:

- Vseteckova J & Grimes C (2024) [Six ways to look after your brain health in your 20s and 30s](#)
- Vseteckova J (2020) [Ageing Well Public Talks Series](#)
- Vseteckova J (2019) [5 reasons why exercising outdoors is great for people who have dementia](#)
- Vseteckova J (2019) [Depression, mood and exercise](#)
- Vseteckova J (2019) [Five Pillars for Ageing Well](#)
- Vseteckova J (2020) [Ageing Brain](#)

Slide 26:

- Methley A & Vseteckova J & Jones K (2020) [Green & Blue & Outdoor spaces](#)
- Vseteckova J, Borgstrom E, Whitehouse A, Kent A, Hart A (2021) [Advance Care Planning \(ACP\)](#)
- Vseteckova J (2020) [Walking the Parks with The OU and The Parks Trust](#)
- Vseteckova J, Methley A, Broad E (2021) [Understanding our memory](#)
- Araya Y, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2022) [Engaging with our environment](#)

Slide 27:

- Hedges V & Vseteckova J (2023) [What should I expect when I am nearing the end of my life?](#)
- Joannidi H, Araya Y, Broad E & Vseteckova J (2022) [Sense of self during aging: how mindfulness and nature can help](#)
- Mehta S, Vseteckova J (2023) [Ageing, health inequalities and person centred care](#)
- Mehta S, Vseteckova J (2023) [Ageing, health inequalities and integrated approach to care](#)
- Araya Y, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2023) [Ageing well by connecting and learning about nature outdoors](#)

Slide 28:

- Vseteckova J (2022) [Pharmacotherapy while ageing](#)
- Joannidi H, Araya Y, Broad E & Vseteckova J (2022) [Sense of Self during ageing – how mindfulness and nature can help](#)
- Mehta S (2022) [Medicines and personalisation while ageing](#)
- Gale B (2022) [How can we prepare for death while ageing?](#)
- Gale B (2022) [Valuing death at home: making preparations](#)

Slide 29: Care and caring related

- Vseteckova J, (2020) [How to age well, while self-isolating](#)
- Vseteckova J, (2020) [SHORT FILM - Ageing Well in Self-Isolation](#)
- Vseteckova J, (2020) [ANIMATION - Keeping healthy in Self-Isolation](#)
- Vseteckova J et al (2020)
- [COVID-19 The effects of self-isolation and lack of physical activity on carers](#)
- Taverner P, Larkin M, Vseteckova J, et al. (2020) [Supporting adult carers during COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Slide 30:

- Robb M, Penson M, Vseteckova J, et al. (2020) [Young carers, COVID-19 and physical activity](#)
- Penson M, Vseteckova J et al. (2020) [Older Carers, COVID-19 and Physical Activity](#)
- Vseteckova J & Methley A (2020) [Acceptance Commitment Therapy \(ACT\) to help carers in challenging COVID-19 times](#)

Slide 31:

- [AGEING WELL PUBLIC TALK SERIES WEBSITE](#)
- [Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2023/2024](#) repository on ORDO Collections
- ['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2022/2023](#) repository on ORDO Collections
- ['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2021/2022](#) repository on ORDO Collections
- ['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2020/2021](#) repository on ORDO Collections
- ['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2019/2020](#) repository on ORDO Collections
- [Midlife MOT OpenLearn Course](#)
- OpenLearnCreate Course on ['Ageing Well' 2019/2020](#)
- [Home exercise no equipment – no problem](#) Blog