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## **Nature relatedness and wellbeing: Quantitative study among youth in Bangalore**

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### **Abstract**

The connection and attachment an individual shares with the environment around them is absolutely necessary for the evaluation of their general wellbeing. Objective: The objective of this research paper is to assess the individual's nature relatedness, mental wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing and to study the relationship between the individual's nature relatedness and their mental and spiritual wellbeing. Methodology: This is a descriptive study with the sample population of youth between the age 18-25 residing in urban Bangalore. The sampling technique used in this study is convenience sampling which is a non-probability sampling method. The sample size of this study was 201 participants and the scales that were used are The Nature Relatedness Scale (NR-6), Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and Spirituality Index of Wellbeing. Results: From the participants' responses it was concluded that there is a positive relationship between nature relatedness and mental and spiritual wellbeing. 50.75% of youth have high levels of nature relatedness, 43.28% have an average level and 5.97% have low levels of nature relatedness. For mental wellbeing 32.34% participants scored high, 60.70% scored average and 6.97% scored low levels. And for spiritual wellbeing 32.34% participants scored high 59.70% scored average and 7.96% scored low levels of spiritu-

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al wellbeing. Conclusion: The findings of the research suggest that there is a positive relationship between nature relatedness and mental and spiritual wellbeing.

**Key Words:** *nature relatedness, spiritual wellbeing, mental wellbeing*

## **Introduction**

Nature is an integral part of an individual's life. Humans depend on nature to satisfy our needs. Nature can be classified into different kinds such as green parks, landscapes, forests, ocean, mountains, beaches, rivers etc. Over the past few years, many studies suggest that spending time in the presence of nature improves one's wellbeing and health. It helps to deal with stresses, improve our mood, feel relaxed and many more benefits. When it comes to nature and spirituality these two factors are intervened. In many cultures nature and spirituality are linked where in different nature aspects such as forest, rivers are considered divine and sacred.

### ***Nature Relatedness and Mental Wellbeing***

Humans have a natural affinity for things that are alive and in nature. Exposure to the environment has numerous benefits, including psychological and physiological, spiritual and ethical improvements. Human identity and personal fulfilment is dependent on our relationship to nature (Mueller, 2016). Plants and their well-being do not have any demographic boundaries, because of this individuals spend huge amounts of money and time on plants, flowers, landscapes and other nature related activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing etc. It is found that people who have access to nearby natural settings have been healthier than those who do not have access. Moreover, it has long term indirect impacts such as increased levels of satisfaction with one's own homes, jobs and life in general (Kaplan, 1995). When an individual spends time in nature, engaging with nature directly or indirectly and having a strong sense of connectedness (psychological, emotional connection) with nature has a positive impact on wellbeing. The importance is not on the time we spend in nature but rather on the connectedness and how we engage in nature through

simple activities such as smelling flowers, gardening, etc. These are the significant and prominent factors in predicting and explaining variance in mental health and wellbeing (Richardson et al, 2021). It's important to preserve and promote public green spaces such as national parks, community parks and gardens in urban areas as it has a positive impact on psychological wellbeing. On the other hand there is a negative impact of environmental damage on psychological wellbeing (Jabbar et al, 2021). In a study it was found that cell windows that had a view of nature were associated with lower levels of stress symptoms in inmates which included digestive illness, headaches, and the overall sick calls from the prisoners who had a view of nature was lesser (Moore,1981). Hence, close relationship with nature has been put forth as a basic human psychological need that must be satisfied to experience complete wellbeing (Baxter & Pelletier, 2019; Hurley & Walker, 2019). The idea of engaging with nature has beneficial impacts on wellbeing are prevalent across many cultures and societies.

### *Nature Relatedness and Spiritual Wellbeing*

Spiritual well-being is a concept used to describe a situation full of motivation or encouragement to find the purpose of life and focus on a certain belief which is then believed to be the truth ( Fisher & Ng 2017). It is an indicator for an individual's quality of life, because individuals who are spiritually prosperous can lead an harmonious life both as individuals and as part of our social environment (Brubaker & Sweeney, 2021). People who engage in wilderness activities perceive spiritual benefits from their experiences. These benefits are more likely to occur in natural settings and while a person is participating in nature oriented activities, these wilderness settings and activities contribute to spiritual experiences (Heintzman, 2003). In several cultures sacred places are set in natural landscapes and these have a role in spiritual wellbeing for instance the Ganga river for Indian Hindus and the Himalayas for the Tibetan Buddhists (Frumkin, 2001; Smyth, 2005). There have been several research studies that argue that natural areas are actively pursued by people to restore themselves from stresses of everyday lives (Mace et al, 1999). Viewing natural scenes is said to improve various dimensions

of mental wellbeing such as mental alertness, attention, and better cognitive performance (Hartig, et al 1991; Tennesen and Cimprich, 1995).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The major base of this research is based on two theories:

### ***Theory of Biophilia***

The term biophilia was first introduced by Erich Fromm in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) he described this term as “the passionate love of life and of all that is alive.” Later on it was proposed as the theory of biophilia stating that humans are genetically predisposed to be attracted to nature, all humans inherently love the natural world (Wilson, 1984).

### ***Theory of Ecological- Self***

In environmental philosophy the theory of Ecological -Self describes the human potential to identify with other living beings, widening and deepening our sense of who we are to include everything alive upon our planet, even the Earth itself (Naess, 1987). The theory basically tells how the wellbeing of humans and the wellbeing of nature is interconnected and that this wellbeing is experienced through a spiritual interconnection of all things (Trigwell et al., 2014).

Through reviewing various studies and articles it was found that very minimal research was done in this area among youth in urban Bangalore. Moreover most of the research papers studied how nature affects the overall wellbeing of an individual; it did not particularly focus on mental and spiritual wellbeing.

The above mentioned studies found that the environment has an influence on the overall wellbeing of an individual. The kind of surrounding and nature an individual has around them will have an impact on how they deal with stress and other challenging situations. Hence through this research the aim is to understand the relationship and closeness youth have towards nature and

how it has an impact on the mental and spiritual wellbeing among youth in urban Bangalore.

### **Methodology**

This is a descriptive study which involves youth between the age of 18-29 years who are currently residing in urban Bangalore.

A structured Google form was shared to collect information. The form consisted of four parts- Profile of the participants, Nature Relatedness Scale (NR-6) (Nisbet & Zelenski, 2013) is a 6-item scale which is scored on a 5-point scale where 1- “Disagree strongly” and 5- “Agree strongly”, Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) (Brown & Platt, 2005) is a 14- item scale which is scored on a 1-5- likert scale where 1 is “None of the time” and 5 is “All of the time”. Lastly Spirituality Index of Wellbeing Scale (Daaleman & Frey, 2004) it is a 12 item scale scored on a 5 pointer scale where 1 is “Strongly agree” and 5- “Strongly disagree”. The average scores of all these were taken to analyze the results.

The study was approved by The Department of Sociology and Social Work CHRIST (Deemed to be University) Bangalore, India. Informed consent was given where the participants were provided with information regarding the research and they were also given the right to withdraw from the study at any point of time. The data collected was imported and analysed using Jamovi software version 2.3.16. Mean and Standard deviation were computed for descriptive data. Spearman’s correlation was used to check the relationship and significance between nature relatedness and mental wellbeing and nature relatedness and spiritual wellbeing. The  $P < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant. The percentage of levels of nature relatedness, mental wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing of youth in Urban Bangalore was assessed using Microsoft excel.

### **Results**

Before conducting the correlation test, normality of the data was checked by using descriptive and the Shapiro-Wilk p values for nature relatedness was

0.001, mental wellbeing 0.325 and spiritual wellbeing 0.084. Since the values for nature relatedness was less than 0.05 it indicated that the data was not normally distributed. Hence Spearman’s correlation analysis was used.

Table No. 1: Correlation between Nature Relatedness and Mental Wellbeing

		<b>Nature Relatedness</b>	<b>Mental Wellbeing</b>
Nature Relatedness	Spearman’s rho	–	–
	p-value	–	–
Mental Wellbeing	Spearman’s rho	0.432***	
	p-value	<.001	–

Table No.1 shows the correlation scores between Nature Relatedness and Mental Wellbeing which is 0.432, with  $p = <.001$  indicating that the variables are extremely significant and have a strong positive correlation.

Table No 2: Correlation between Nature Relatedness Spiritual Wellbeing

		<b>Nature Relatedness</b>	<b>Spiritual Wellbeing</b>
Nature Relatedness	Spearman’s rho	–	–
	p-value	–	–
Spiritual Wellbeing	Spearman’s rho	0.315 ***	–
	p-value	<.001	–

Table No. 2 shows the correlation scores between Nature Relatedness and Spiritual Wellbeing which is 0.315, with  $p = <.001$  indicating that the variables are extremely significant and have a strong positive correlation.

Table No. 3: Percentage of different levels of Nature Relatedness, Mental Wellbeing and Spiritual Wellbeing among the participants

	<b>High</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Low</b>
Nature Relatedness	50.75%	43.28%	5.97%
Mental Wellbeing	32.34%	60.70%	6.97%
Spiritual Wellbeing	32.34%	59.70%	7.96%

Table No. 3 shows that 50.75% of youth have high levels of nature relatedness, 43.28% have an average level and 5.97% have low levels of nature relatedness. The participant scores for mental wellbeing were 32.34% scored high, 60.70% scored average and 6.97% scored low levels. And for spiritual wellbeing 32.34% participants scored high 59.70% scored average and 7.96% scored low levels of spiritual wellbeing.

## Discussion

In the current study's correlation analysis, it is evident that there is a statistically significant relationship between an Individual's nature relatedness and mental and spiritual wellbeing. Increase in affiliation towards nature is seen to have a direct, positive impact on the individual's mental and spiritual wellbeing. The closer one is towards nature, and the more one engages in environmental activities will lead to better wellbeing of the individual. These results show similarities between the already existing literatures which suggest that individuals with environmental consciousness and connectedness which includes attitudes, beliefs, motives, values, ideas and notions that are favourable towards conservation of environment have better quality of life (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000). Individual differences in nature relatedness are associated with differences in wellbeing among people (Nisbet et. al, 2013).

In a survey it was found that the amount of stress, anxiety, pressure and depression among college students in the U.S has rapidly increased leading to mental health problems, self-injury and suicidal thoughts among the students (Reuters Health 2019). Hence it is important to create healthy university environments that help students to deal with their stresses. Studies conducted among University students found that students who used campus green space showed higher levels of overall quality of life and better quality of university life (McFarland et al., 2008; Phuoc Nguyen & Nguyen, 20220). These find-

ings can encourage universities and schools in Bangalore to invest in green campuses which in turn can improve the wellbeing of the students. In another study it was found that noting three good things in nature every day for five days consecutively seemed to increase connectedness with nature among the participants in the intervention group, in comparison to those in the control group who noted three factual observations everyday unrelated to nature. The intervention group, furthermore, seemed to show an improvement in psychological health (Richardson & Sheffield, 2017).

Just like how nature relatedness affects the mental wellbeing of an individual, it also affects the spiritual wellbeing. A study conducted among Muslim university students found that students who spend time in nature showed greater levels of spiritual wellbeing and better mood than those students who did not engage in outdoor green spaces (Roslan et al.,2022). Similarly a study conducted at Ontario, Canada supports that camping in a natural environment, in green spaces helps individuals to become more self-aware and gives them a sense of belonging. It makes you feel free and at peace which in turn helps you relate to spirituality compared to community based camps (Sweatman & Heintzman, 2004). Another study had similar findings where participants described the natural environment as therapeutic and helpful in improving moods. In comparison to the human built environment, the natural environment helps in gaining more spiritual experiences (Hegarty, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

In the current study it is concluded that there is significant, strong positive correlation between nature relatedness and mental and spiritual wellbeing. Here the relationship is positive because as nature relatedness increases both mental and spiritual wellbeing increases as well. Stating that an individual who spends quality time with nature will have better mental and spiritual wellbeing than an individual who is not very connected with nature.

However, a few of the limitations of this study is that even though the tools were reliable and valid the responses that were attained would have been more reliable and accurate if the data was collected through more credible sources. Furthermore, the living conditions of the participants are distinct and there will be inconsistency in terms of cultural, religious and financial backgrounds which were not taken into account in this study. The role that these factors



may have played in this study is unknown. Moreover, though the correlation existing between the variables were analysed, there was no thorough exploration of causation.

### Social Work Implications

The results of the current study clearly indicate that affiliation towards nature has a strong positive influence on the individual's mental and spiritual wellbeing. Hence as social workers we should spread this awareness and encourage more environment friendly plans and schemes in offices, work spaces, hospitals etc. Through evidence based practices it is found that nature based interventions such as wilderness therapy, gardening and horticulture based interventions, farming interventions and animal interventions are beneficial for vulnerable youth in improving their overall wellbeing, as a result social workers can encourage the incorporation of these nature based therapies in improving the wellbeing of youth (Overbey et al., 2021).

Furthermore in schools children can be promoted to engage in nature related activities such as gardening, watering plants etc. From a very young age so that in future their quality of wellbeing will be better.

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