

People Who Commute through Natural Environments Daily Report Better Mental Health

This association is even stronger among active commuters

BARCELONA (Spain), October 18, 2018.- According to a new study led by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal) —a centre supported by the "la Caixa" Foundation—, people who commute through natural environments report better mental health. This is the main conclusion of a **research based on questionnaires answered by nearly 3,600 participants from four European cities** and [published in *Environment International*](#).

The study was conducted within the Positive Health Effects of the Natural Outdoor Environment in Typical Populations in Different Regions in Europe project ([PHENOTYPE](#)). The 3,599 participants from **Barcelona (Spain), Doetinchem (the Netherlands), Kaunas (Lithuania) and Stoke-on-Trent (UK)** answered a questionnaire about their commuting habits and their mental health.

The statistical analysis showed that respondents commuting through natural environments on a daily basis had **on average a 2.74 point higher mental health score** compared to those who commuted through natural environments less frequently. This **association was even stronger among people who reported active commuting** (i.e. walking or cycling). In this case, natural environments were defined as all public and private outdoor spaces that contain 'green' and/or 'blue' natural elements such as street trees, forests, city parks and natural parks/reserves, and also included all types of waterbodies.

Other results showed that there were more active commuters among those who declared commuting through natural environments daily. However, the **quality of the natural environments** in which commuting took place **did not influence the results**.

"From previous experimental studies we knew that **physical activity in natural environments can reduce stress, improve mood and mental restoration** when compared to the equivalent activity in urban environments. Although this study is the first of its kind to our knowledge and, therefore, more research will be needed, our data show that commuting through these natural spaces alone may also have a positive effect on mental health", says Wilma Zijlema, ISGlobal researcher and first author of the study.

"Mental health and physical inactivity are two of the main public health problems associated with the life in urban environments. **Urban design could be a powerful tool** to confront these challenges and create healthier cities. One way of doing so would be **investing in natural commuting routes for cycling and walking**", states Mark Nieuwenhuijsen, coordinator of the [ISGlobal Initiative of Urban Planning, Environment and Health](#) and last author of the study.

Reference

Wilma L. Zijlema, Ione Avila-Palencia, Margarita Triguero-Mas, Christopher Gidlow, Jolanda Maas, Hanneke Kruize, Sandra Andrusaityte, Regina Grazuleviciene, Mark J. Nieuwenhuijsen. Active commuting through natural environments is associated with better mental health: Results from the PHENOTYPE project. *Environ. Int.* 2018. 2018 Dec; 121 (Pt 1): 721-727. doi: [/10.1016/j.envint.2018.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2018.10.002)

About ISGlobal

The Barcelona Institute for Global Health, ISGlobal, is the fruit of an innovative alliance between the "la Caixa" Foundation and academic and government institutions to contribute to the efforts undertaken by the international community to address the challenges in global health. ISGlobal is a consolidated hub of excellence in research that has grown out of work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and the Parc de Salut MAR and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. The pivotal mechanism of its work model is the transfer of knowledge generated by scientific research to practice, a task undertaken by the institute's Education and Policy and Global Development departments. ISGlobal a member of the CERCA programme of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

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