

Nature Engagement, Nature Connectedness and Quality of Life in people living with dementia: the DETERMIND study

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BACKGROUND

- Engaging with nature in nature is widely recognised as beneficial (Hartig *et al.*, 2014).
- However, existing research for people living with dementia is limited, and largely focused on structured activities in care settings (Barrett *et al.*, 2019), with relatively little understanding of how people living in the community engage with nature in everyday life (Mmako *et al.*, 2020).
- In addition, while nature connectedness (reflecting a person's sense of relationship with nature) has been linked to wellbeing (Schultz, 2002; Capaldi *et al.*, 2014), it has rarely been examined in people living with dementia.
- Understanding both how people with dementia spend time in nature and how connected they feel to it, and whether this relates to Quality of Life (a multidimensional concept encompassing both objective circumstances and subjective wellbeing, reflecting how people experience and live their lives, Ettema *et al.*, 2005) may inform dementia inclusive policy and practice.

AIMS

- Describe patterns of nature engagement and nature connection in people living with dementia.
- Examine associations between nature engagement and nature connectedness with Quality of Life.

METHODS

Design

Cross-sectional analysis using secondary data from the DETERMIND cohort, a large longitudinal study tracking a range of outcomes in people recently diagnosed with dementia in England.

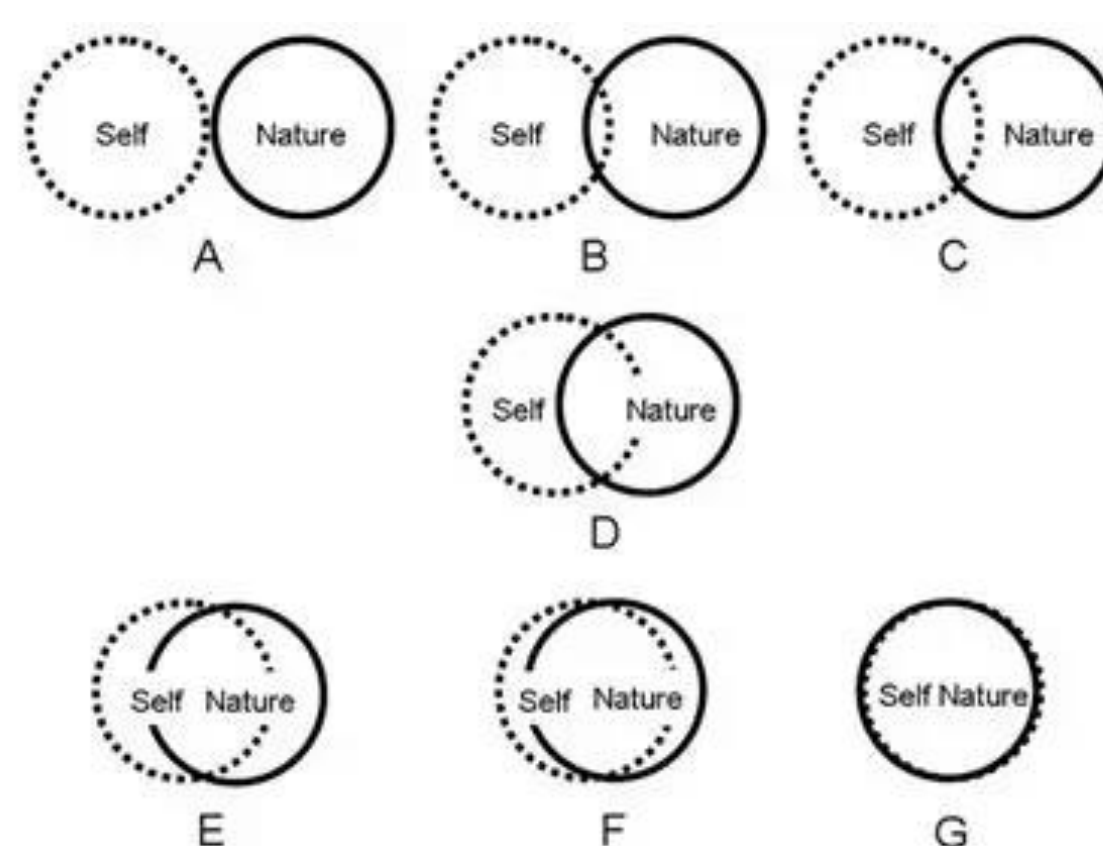


Sample

360 people (90% living in the community) recently diagnosed with dementia, with nature-related data.

Measures

- Nature engagement (frequency, type of nature, time alone)
- Nature connectedness (Inclusion of Nature in Self scale*)



*INS, Schultz, 2002

- Quality of Life (DEMQOL, EQ-5D-5L, ONS4)

Analysis

- Hierarchical regression models
- Adjusted for sociodemographic and dementia-related variables

RESULTS

Nature engagement common, but shaped by context

 66% participants spent time in nature weekly or more (similar to national rates).

 Most visits to urban green spaces (69%).

 Regular engagement (weekly or more) was higher in community-dwelling participants vs. those in residential care (70% vs. 34%; $\chi^2(4)=22.67, p<.001$).

 Cognitive impairment not associated frequency of time in nature ($\chi^2(8)=9.70, p= n.s.$), but was associated with whether visits were made alone or with others ($\chi^2(4)=26.32, p<.001$).

No clear associations between nature engagement and Quality of Life

 Associations small and not statistically significant across models.

Feeling connected to nature related to Quality of Life

 Higher nature connectedness was associated with better subjective wellbeing (ONS4; $\beta = .16-.22, p < .01$).

 Nature connectedness was also associated with time spent in nature ($\beta = .19, p < .01$), suggesting the constructs are related but distinct.

CONCLUSIONS

- Key message:** Nature engagement is common and shaped by context, whereas feeling connected to nature shows a clearer and more consistent link to Quality of Life.
- Interpretation:** This suggests that how people internally experience nature may play a particularly important role, alongside their access to it.
- Implication:** Supporting opportunities that foster meaningful, personally resonant nature experiences may enhance Quality of Life for people living with dementia.

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PhD project details:



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