

Exposure to urban greenness has unequal effects on men's and women's mental health

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Exposure to urban greenness leads to greater mental health benefits for

women, although they are less likely to use these green spaces as frequently for reasons mainly related to safety concerns. This is one of the main conclusions of a study led by the Institute of *Environmental Science and Technology* of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB) that analyzes the relationship between mental health and exposure to urban greenness with a deeper look into the differences in results depending on gender and sex.

The study, recently published in the scientific journal *Health and Place*, finds that the effects of urban greenness on [mental health](#) are unequally distributed in women when compared to men. Specifically, the results suggest that women benefit more from contact with [green spaces](#) for walking and leisure but are less likely to use them than men. This could be due to women's safety concerns in these [urban areas](#), as well as gender norms and [social roles](#). "It could also be explained by the fact that the quality and characteristics of these spaces are not designed and planned for women the same way as they are for men," explains Marta-Beatriz Fernández Núñez, researcher at ICTA-UAB and first author of the study.

The research team, which includes scientists from the Forest Science and Technology Center of Catalonia (CTFC), stresses that from a policy and planning perspective, there is a need to ensure greater gendered equity and justice in greenness. They therefore call on park planners and designers to carefully plan new greenness with the voice of female residents, especially children.

New planning programs should include designs for recreational, natural and [safety features](#) that particularly respond to their individual and sociocultural needs and preferences. "For example, addressing environmental and social cues in parks through better maintenance and design could help mitigate some of the most pressing [safety issues](#) for women," says Fernandez-Nunez. In addition, designers and planners

could add pathways easy for strollers and playgrounds for kids so that both children and parents could benefit from urban greenness at the same time. Otherwise, cities risk excluding residents.

The study also highlights that the existing [scientific literature](#) does not adequately use the terminology related to sex and gender in association with mental health outcomes in an urban greenness environment. Therefore, they consider that future studies need to analyze in-depth the societal gender differences associated with mental health and urban greenness and use the right terminology for it to properly assign characteristics and uses of greenness with mental health outcomes and their pathways.

More information: Marta-Beatriz Fernández Núñez et al, Gender and sex differences in urban greenness' mental health benefits: A systematic review, *Health & Place* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102864](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102864)

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