

# Festivals can be a powerful force for sustainable lifestyle changes, new research shows

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Festivals and mass gatherings can empower and inspire people making lifestyle changes for a sustainable future, according to new research

from a vegan festival which suggests the power of these collective experiences may have been underestimated.

In-depth interviews with people attending a [festival](#) celebrating the [vegan](#) lifestyle showed that these events can provide a restorative retreat from the majority, meat-eating society. For vegans, attending is an opportunity to 'recharge' their beliefs; seek out [social connection](#); and to be inspired by a collective identity- focused experience.

Dr. Annayah Prosser, from the University of Bath's School of Management who led the [research](#) said, "The festival experience seemed to be a place where vegans could recharge from the strain of going against the meat-eating norm. They could enjoy a sense of community and reinvigorate their motivation for social change.

The paper, "Overcoming (vegan) burnout: Mass-gatherings can provide respite and rekindle shared identity and social action efforts in moralized minority groups," is published in *Political Psychology*.

"In the UK, recent estimates suggest that less than 2% of people are vegan, so many vegans are incredibly isolated in their daily lives. Our participants spoke about being 'mocked' by others and feeling 'depression' or 'dread' when others questioned their identity and dietary choices," Dr. Prosser said.

"We found that festival offered an opportunity for social connection for vegans, which seemed to encourage them to 'feel braver' about engaging in conversations about their veganism and to maintain their 'everyday activism.'"

Even queuing for food and drink, not normally a celebrated festival experience, was seen as a chance to strike up friendly conversations and create positive social connections.

The research was carried out at the Vegan Camp Out in 2021. The festival is an annual weekend event which is advertised as celebrating veganism in all aspects. In-depth qualitative field interviews were conducted with 20 event attendees (10 women, eight men, two non-binary), between the ages of 21 and 58 years old.

The social difficulties of the vegan experience can lead to poor mental health and, for some, 'activist burnout'—an intense form of physical and mental exhaustion. Aside from the toll this takes on the individual, it also hampers societal transitions towards plant-based eating, shown to be an important mechanism for cutting [carbon emissions](#) and supporting a [sustainable future](#).

Vegans can be stereotyped as loud activists, but for many the effort and difficulties of going against the social norm can be a draining and sometimes lonely experience. Negativity, stigma and even hostility can strain their capacity to maintain their lifestyle.

It can push people to downplay their beliefs, to refrain from discussing their veganism or exclude themselves from social situations which will make their veganism visible to others.

"The influence of minority groups is subtle but crucial to social change processes in the long term," said Dr. Prosser. "We know that vegans help to encourage societal meat reduction, and encourage sustainable food choices in their social networks and from the wider market."

"Our research suggests that bringing [minority groups](#) together is an important method for supporting [social change](#) towards more sustainable futures—in this case a plant-based or vegan diet. Our interviewees told us they felt empowered to 'go further' in their daily lives and become involved in community activism after attending the event."

This research adds to a previous [study](#) of secular mass gatherings, including Burning Man and Latitude, which showed that the festival experience can be transformative for many attendees—encouraging social connection and pro-social 'helping' behaviors which lasted for many months after the event.

"It is clear that festival environments are very important for attendees, and can result in significant transformations to our personal and social identities," said Dr. Prosser.

The study involved the Universities of Exeter, Groningen, Western Australia and Amsterdam Business School.

**More information:** Annayah M. B. Prosser et al, Overcoming (vegan) burnout: Mass gatherings can provide respite and rekindle shared identity and social action efforts in moralized minority groups, *Political Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/pops.13009](https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.13009)

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