A team of researchers affiliated with multiple institutions in the U.K. has found that people enjoying nature in urban settings tend to experience less loneliness than those who stay home. In their paper published in the journal Scientific Reports, the group describes their study that involved the use of the Urban Mind smartphone application.

The Urban Mind app, created to allow people to measure their experiences living in rural or urban environments, prompted users three times each day to answer questions related to how they are feeling and what their surroundings are like. The creation of the app was a collaborative effort between researchers at Kings College London, landscape architects J&L Gibbons and Nomad Projects. In this new effort, the researchers analyzed data supplied by users of the app to learn more about the factors that can lead people to feel lonely.

In their effort, the researchers looked at data from 756 volunteer users (who answered 16,600 of the assessments) of the Urban Mind app between early 2018 and early 2020. Their primary focus was on factors that influence loneliness—a condition, they note, that kills more people than obesity or air pollution. As part of their analyses, they found that overcrowding was one such factor—leading to increased loneliness in 39% of the volunteers. But they found that people living in cities could reduce their feelings of loneliness by visiting parks or other nature-type areas. They found that a single such trip reduced feelings of loneliness by 28% in the volunteers. They also found that when people found themselves in places where they felt socially included, loneliness in the volunteers fell by 21%—and when social inclusion happened in a nature-type environment, loneliness fell even more—by another 8%.

The researchers note that their findings agree with results from other studies that have shown exposure to social inclusion or nature can reduce feelings of loneliness, suggesting that more could be done by health professionals to reduce the collective loneliness felt by people living in cities. They also note that familiarity with the places they visit has been shown to play a role in reducing such feelings as well, though that was not included in this study.


© 2021 Science X Network