

# 63% of people reported decreased time spent visiting green spaces during lockdown

March 9 2021, by Ali Howard

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Credit: University of Glasgow

Almost two thirds of people, 63%, reported a decrease in time spent visiting green spaces following movement restrictions in the original lockdown period, which began on 23rd March 2020.

Inequalities in [green space](#) use were also sustained, and may even have been exacerbated, as a result of lockdowns and restrictions of movement in the UK due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

New research, led by the University of Glasgow MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, and published today in *BMJ Open*, finds that those from a more socially disadvantaged background were a third less likely to visit green spaces before, and more than two thirds less likely to visit them after restrictions were enforced. Adults over 65 years-old also reported visiting green spaces less often after restrictions were in place than their middle aged counterparts.

Overall, 93% of all respondents had visited green space in the year before movement restrictions were enforced. However, in contrast, only 53% reported visiting green space following pandemic restrictions being put in place.

The research highlighted that spending time in green space benefited [mental health](#). Two thirds of respondents reported that green spaces benefited their mental [health](#) more following restrictions on movement compared to before. Female respondents were most likely to agree that visiting green space benefitted their mental health following the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions.

Previous research has shown that contact with green space may disproportionately benefit disadvantaged populations, reducing health inequalities and therefore weakening the effects of poverty.

Ms Hannah Burnett, who led the research, said: "We know that green space can positively influence people's health and well-being, but there were sharp falls in the time people spent there when lockdown was at its most strict. Inequalities in the use of green space mean the more disadvantaged communities are less likely to use green space.

"Our findings show that lockdowns and movement restrictions definitely sustained and may have even exacerbated inequalities in the use of green space, which is cause for concern. Given the benefits that access to these spaces can have, particularly for those in [disadvantaged communities](#), these findings emphasize the importance of green spaces remaining open in any future lockdowns."

Dr. Jonathan Olsen said "Our research showed those who used green spaces felt a benefit on their mental health. At a time when many are facing additional worries and strain due to the pandemic, parks and open spaces have been a crucial asset for mental health. Parks and open spaces are an essential resource for community wellbeing, and they must remain open, protected and prioritized in any future fiscal squeeze"

For this study, researchers gathered data from a nationally representative cross-sectional survey administered through YouGov between 30th April and 1st May 2020. Data from 2,252 adults aged 18 years and over were collected on the time spent visiting green space and any change in their experience of green space, including missing social interaction, increased physical activity, and feeling greater mental health benefits in green space.

The study "Change in time spent visiting and experiences of green [space](#) following restrictions on [movement](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic: A nationally representative cross-sectional study of U.K. adults" is published in *BMJ Open*.

**More information:** Hannah Burnett et al. Change in time spent visiting and experiences of green space following restrictions on movement during the COVID-19 pandemic: a nationally representative cross-sectional study of UK adults, *BMJ Open* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-044067](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-044067)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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