

People's connection to nature examined in public health research

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Feeling connected to nature or the environment is important for health,

and new public health research from the Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa examines how these feelings of connection can be measured.

Such measurements are important because health research relies on objective measurements. For example, if researchers want to investigate whether people who feel close to nature have better blood pressure or mental health, they need a way to measure people's closeness to nature.

"Land, nature and environmental connectedness need to be better explored in health research," said Mapuana Antonio, an assistant professor in public health specializing in Native Hawaiian and Indigenous health. "But 'connectedness' can be a difficult thing to measure."

Evaluating previous studies

For the study, Antonio and her co-authors searched for previous studies that used surveys or questionnaires to measure people's connectedness to nature or their environments. Then, they evaluated these tools. The paper is published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Their search revealed that some scales provided validated measurements of relatedness to nature. For example, the Connectedness to Nature Scale is a 14-item questionnaire that asks people questions such as whether they feel they are "part of the web of life," or "feel embedded within the broader [natural](#) world." People's answers are used to calculate an overall score.

"Nature connectedness scales could be used in research to support decision-making processes for managing sacred spaces such as Maunakea," said Samantha Keaulana Scott, a Ph.D. candidate in public

health and the lead author of the paper.

Other scales were designed to measure people's environmental attitudes and values. For example, higher scores on the Revised New Ecological Paradigm Scale were linked with engaging in eco-friendly behaviors.

Still, other scales measured people's cultural or spiritual connectedness. Higher scores on the Hawaiian Cultural Scale were linked to valuing Hawaiian beliefs and learning about Hawaiian ways from family members.

"These findings will help us to reconstruct the way we think about health by quantifying people's [health needs](#) and could lend support to policies and programs that promote health equity," Antonio said. "For Indigenous peoples, this is another way of providing rigorous and concrete data, while communicating the importance of our deep relationship with the land to decision makers about the need to reclaim Indigenous land stewardship."

Keaulana and Antonio's co-authors included Thompson school colleagues Melissa Kahili-Heede, Lorinda Riley, Mei Linn N. Park, Kuaiwi Laka Makua and Jetney Kahaulahilahi Vegas.

More information: Samantha Keaulana et al, A Scoping Review of Nature, Land, and Environmental Connectedness and Relatedness, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18115897](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115897)

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