75th AAN ANNUAL MEETING ABSTRACT

Media Contacts:
Renee Tessman, rtessman@aan.com, (612) 928-6137
Natalie Conrad, nconrad@aan.com, (612) 928-6164

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL 4 P.M. ET, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2023

Abstract Title: Proximity to Green and Blue Spaces and Serious Psychological Distress in Urban-Dwelling Older Adults: Analysis of Washington State BRFSS data

Press Release Title: Is Living Close to Parks, Water Better for Your Brain? *Adults Living Closer to Green, Blue Spaces May Have Lower Psychological Distress*

Authors: Adithya Vegaraju[1], Solmaz Amiri[2]

[1]College of Medicine, [2]IREACH (Institute for Research and Education to Advance Community Health), Washington State University

Objective: To assess the associations between proximity to green and blue spaces and Serious Psychological Distress (SPD) among urban-dwelling older adults in Washington State.

Background: Serious psychological distress (SPD) is associated with increased incidence of mild cognitive impairment, dementia, and death in older adults. Residing in closer proximity to green and blue spaces is associated with reduced SPD in youth and middle-aged persons, but there is a relative lack of data on urban-dwelling older adults.

Design/Methods: The 2011-2019 dataset from the Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) was utilized to assess SPD among Washington residents aged 65 and over. Participants who scored above 13 on the Kessler-6 questionnaire were considered to have SPD. Green space was defined as public parks, community gardens and cemeteries whereas blue space was defined as water bodies such as lakes, reservoirs, large rivers, and coasts. Proximity to green and blue spaces was generated at the level of Census blocks and aggregated at the zip code level. Control variables included age, sex, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and marital status. Generalized linear models were applied.

Results: Approximately 2% of urban-dwelling older adults had SPD. Seventy percent of older adults lived within half a mile of green space and 60% within half a mile of blue space. The odds of experiencing SPD was lower among urban-dwelling adults living within half a mile of green or blue spaces compared to urban-dwelling older adults living further than half a mile from green or blue spaces within Washington State.

Conclusions: Our findings indicate that closer proximity to green and blue spaces is associated with a reduction in SPD in urban-dwelling older adults. Results from this study may fuel further studies investigating urban environments and neuropsychiatric conditions as well as facilitate programs to improve mental health outcomes of elderly residents residing in long-term care centers or nursing homes.

Study Support: None