




**GREEN AND BLUE SPACES: PATHWAYS
TO BETTER HEALTH. WHAT IS THE
EVIDENCE?**

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PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

- Snowball sampling
- Libraries, museums, nature conservancies, local businesses (Chamber of Commerce)
- Social media groups
- Future studies



HOW NEW ENGLAND
ISLAND RESIDENTS VIEW
THE INFLUENCE OF THE
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN
THEIR LIVES

Island Residents of
Nantucket, Martha's
Vineyard, and Block Island
(N=51)

Natural environment is the
setting for physical exercise,
possesses therapeutic
qualities, improves mental
health, and sports a spiritual
or reflective practice.

Participants also believed that
their levels of nature
relatedness were mainly
influenced by their childhood
experiences, leisure activities,
and lifestyle choices.

How would you rate your
current level of nature
relatedness? The mean score
for participants was 4.5 (SD
= 0.08) with a score of 5
indicating a “high” level.

EXPLORING THE
INFLUENCE OF THE
NATURAL
ENVIRONMENT ON
THE LIVES OF NEW
ENGLAND ISLAND
RESIDENTS DURING
THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC

- Island Residents of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard (N=41)
- Study initiates this inquiry by investigating the influence that nature had on their well-being specifically during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- The influence of nature on their well-being increased during the pandemic.

Score	1	2	3	4	5
	Nature Has Negatively Influenced My Well-Being During the Pandemic				Nature Has Positively Influenced My Well-Being During the Pandemic
	0%	0%	2.4% (n=1)	7.3% (n=3)	90.2% (n=37%)

BENEFITS/CHALLENGES

- Some residents shared how they felt safer being detached from the mainland and living on an island during the pandemic.
- Access to natural resources, they liked living amongst a smaller population of people and having the support of the community.
- Limited supplies in the stores and depending on a ferry for transportation to see friends and family and shop on the mainland when there were safety concerns surrounding traveling.
- Amount of people coming to the island, especially during the summer months, when there were limited resources and worry about contracting the virus.

A hand is shown from the bottom left, holding a single green leaf. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a natural setting. A semi-transparent white box with a dark border is centered over the leaf, containing the text 'KEY FINDINGS (MENTAL HEATH)'.

KEY FINDINGS (MENTAL HEATH)

Ninety-five percent, indicated that nature had positively influenced their mental well-being during the pandemic.

Participants shared that being in nature has helped to reduce their stress and anxiety, and in many instances was essential for their mental health.

Words such as “paramount,” “critical,” and “essential” were used to describe the importance nature had on their mental health.



KEY
FINDINGS
(MENTAL
HEALTH)

“Beauty of nature here helps me mentally by putting things in perspective. It provides the peace needed to maintain my mental well being and provided an outlet for the additional stress and anxiety brought on by COVID. I am positive that if I did not have nature to retreat to, I would have been a complete basket case during quarantine.”

“Less depressed and less saddened”

“Walking through a beautiful grove of trees/along the beach taking the time to see, hear and smell everything around me become an essential escape from the anxiety & stress we have all been facing.”

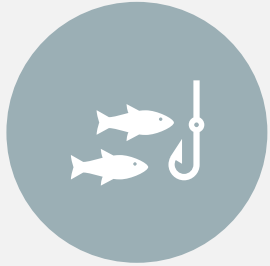
“Sometimes I have panic attacks and they are easier to manage when I connect to nature.”

KEY FINDINGS (PHYSICAL HEALTH)

- Eighty-four percent of the participants said that nature had influenced their physical health during the pandemic.
- Participants shared that they have used nature as the setting for their physical exercise during this time and that for many, their frequency of exercise had increased.



KEY FINDINGS (PHYSICAL HEALTH)



“With limited social interaction, solo activities such as hunting, fishing, shell fishing, and hiking have been critical in avoiding boredom, promoting exercise, and relieving stress”



“Outdoor recreation (walking, running, biking) has reduced my anxiety, kept me in shape during a time when gyms have been closed, and allowed me to have some social life.”



“Nature provided an outlet for physical exercise and was helpful in calming me.”



“I need to be outside in order to feel any sort of stability. Actually when the pandemic began I started going swimming in the cold ocean because everything else just felt so out of control. I could not trust my own body--every ache, headache, cough was cause for concern. There was so much focus on the fear of a fever. So I found immersing myself in the cold (40 degree) water was a way to exert control over my body.”



KEY
FINDINGS
(SOCIAL/
EMOTIONAL
HEALTH)

- Sixty-three percent of participants indicated that being in nature had influenced their social and emotional well-being during the pandemic.
- Primarily, nature had influenced this aspect of their well-being because it provided a space for participants to safely interact with others.



KEY FINDINGS (SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH)

- “While social interaction all but stopped for me I was able to people watch others enjoying nature. Sitting on the beach I noticed everyone was much more friendly. We were just happy to see another living being & everyone waved or yelled hello.”
- “Nature provided an outlet of separation from my son who normally is away at school”
- “Going out for walks makes me feel free from the lockdowns.”

ISLAND BLUE SPACES: A DEEPER EXPLORATION

- Results showed that access to nature was the strongest influence on participants' decision to live on an island with 91% percent ($n=34$) "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that it influences their decision to live on an island.
- "What is your favorite part of living on an island?" Responses fell into three main themes, access to **nature**, community, and solitude.

"Raising children here was beautiful...they can all identify birds, love to kayak and go clamming, they know how to cook, can drive a boat and stick shift car and when they come home they appreciate the island so much more than they did growing up. In the winter, as soon as the ponds freeze the entire community is on the ice. Skate swaps take place and the ice boats get pulled out and everyone has hot chocolate pondside....for real. It's pretty perfect."

INSIGHTS ON ISLAND LIVING: PILOTING PARTICIPANT-PRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHS

- Piloted the use of participant-produced images to explore what it is like to live on an island in New England. Through interpretative engagement, an identified emergent theme in the photographs (N=47) confirmed the islanders' reliance on nature.
- **Results:** Islanders depend on nature for opportunities to be immersed in beauty and tranquility, the need for water-based transportation, to engage in leisure time physical activities, and as space to make connections with others.

IMMERSED IN BEAUTY AND
TRANQUILITY



“Colorful Sunset Over the Harbor”



WATER-BASED TRANSPORTATION

“Paddled to Work”



LEISURE TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

“Long Walks on Empty Coastlines with Dogs”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION

“Community and Congregating
for Birthdays or Random
Events”



WHAT IS NEXT?

- Grant to further support this work in exploring the influence of nature on the lives of older adult island residents.
- Photo elicitation interviews





to fill out the
SESSION
EVALUATION FORM

We Welcome Your Feedback



Open The
Camera App.



Point your camera at a
QR Code to scan it.