

Forest therapy as an innovative public health strategy, especially for mental health during covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

There is a growing body of empirical evidence revealing the value of nature experience for humans as a health promoter. Forest therapy is gaining worldwide scientific interests to evaluate the different health effects of nature on humans. Especially during the covid-19 pandemic, people have increasingly visited forests or parks for relaxation or outdoor activities. "Forest therapy" is derived from the Japanese original "Shinrin-Yoku" which literally means "immersion in the forest atmosphere". „Forest bathing“ describes a health-promoting and preventive usage of forest visits, whereas forest therapy considers a variety of therapeutic interventions in a forest for certain diseases. A large number of studies have proven the positive effects of forest visits on the psychological and mental well-being: Forest visits lead to a positive emotional regulation by reduction of anxiety, anger, fatigue and sadness as well as an increase of attentiveness and concentration, joy, creativity and meaningfulness. In addition to the mental and emotional improvement, the special forest climate with its higher humidity as well as cool and clean air relieves the respiratory tract system. Also, microbes and BVOCs show an influence on the human immune system by interacting with the human microbiom. Additionally, visits to nature promotes the general physical activity. Forest therapy can qualify as an new innovative public health approach. It is effective on stress reduction by different methods like mindfulness-based nature experiences, climatotherapy, or body-mind methods in a forest setting. Forest therapy programs should be guided by a specially trained forest therapy guide/forest therapist. Depending on the target group, different concepts of health promotion, prevention or therapy can be carried out in the natural environemt in an quiete forest or park. Further qualitative studies are needed to prove the benefits of forest therapy for various diseases as well as to develop different multimodal health approaches



Biography

Gisela Immich is a German researcher with the focus on nature for health. She is an expert on forest therapy and complementary medicine, especially on health resort medicine. She is certified Forest Therapy Guide of ANFT (USA), mindfulness practioner and has completed her Master degree on prevention on the life span at the department of sport sciences at the Technical University Munich, and gained a Bachelor of Science degree in CAM. She is working as a scientific researcher at the University Munich to develop criteria for cure and healing forests in Bavarian health resort. She is teaching mindfulness in nature and nature connectedness, is co-author of the German book "forest therapy" by Springer Nature (2019) which will be translate in English soon. Founding member of the new competence center forest medicine and nature therapy, and worldwide connected to other researchers in this specialized field.

Publications

- The Psychological and Physical Effects of Forests on Human Health: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
- Evaluating the Effectiveness of a One-Week Multimodal Prevention Program for Slowing down and Stress Reduction
- The Psychological and Physical Effects of Forests on Human Health: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
- Grüne Städte fördern Gesundheit und Wohlbefinden - urbanes Grün wichtiger denn je.
- Dem Wohlbefinden auf der Spur: im Wald

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