



Can our urban environments helps us be (equally) well?



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Population health: thousands to millions of people





Public health had great success in the past, by thinking about how our environment harms us, and then altering the environment to reduce the harm

More recently, the miracle of modern medicine has led the way in health improvement, and we stopped thinking about place / environment



Medicine is now very good at keeping us alive



Although modern medicine has greatly reduced mortality rates, we still suffer from chronic diseases, are generally miserable, and lack wellbeing.

27% of the EU adult population experienced at least one mental disorder in the past year; an estimated 83 million people.



Clinical medicine struggles to fix problems of this nature and at this scale.



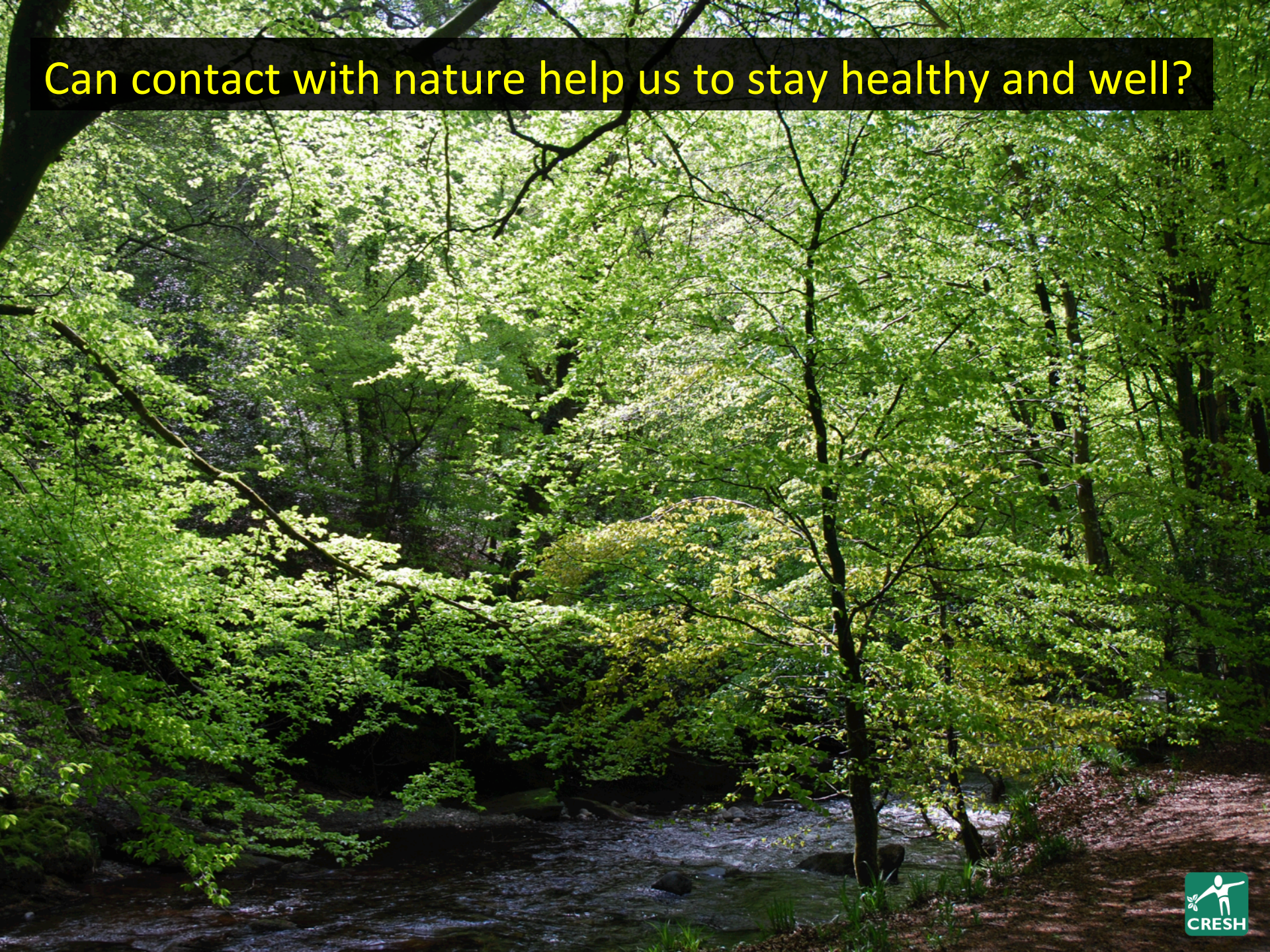
So, the search for better health has led a return to thinking about environment. Places aren't just 'containers' in which individuals live... places actively shape lives (for better and worse).



Scotland has a new strategic approach to thinking about health and place. 'Good Places, Better Health', explicitly recognises the potential for characteristics of places to help population health and wellbeing



Can contact with nature help us to stay healthy and well?



What kind of nature? Often, we're focused on urban nature (parks, woodlands, river corridors etc.).



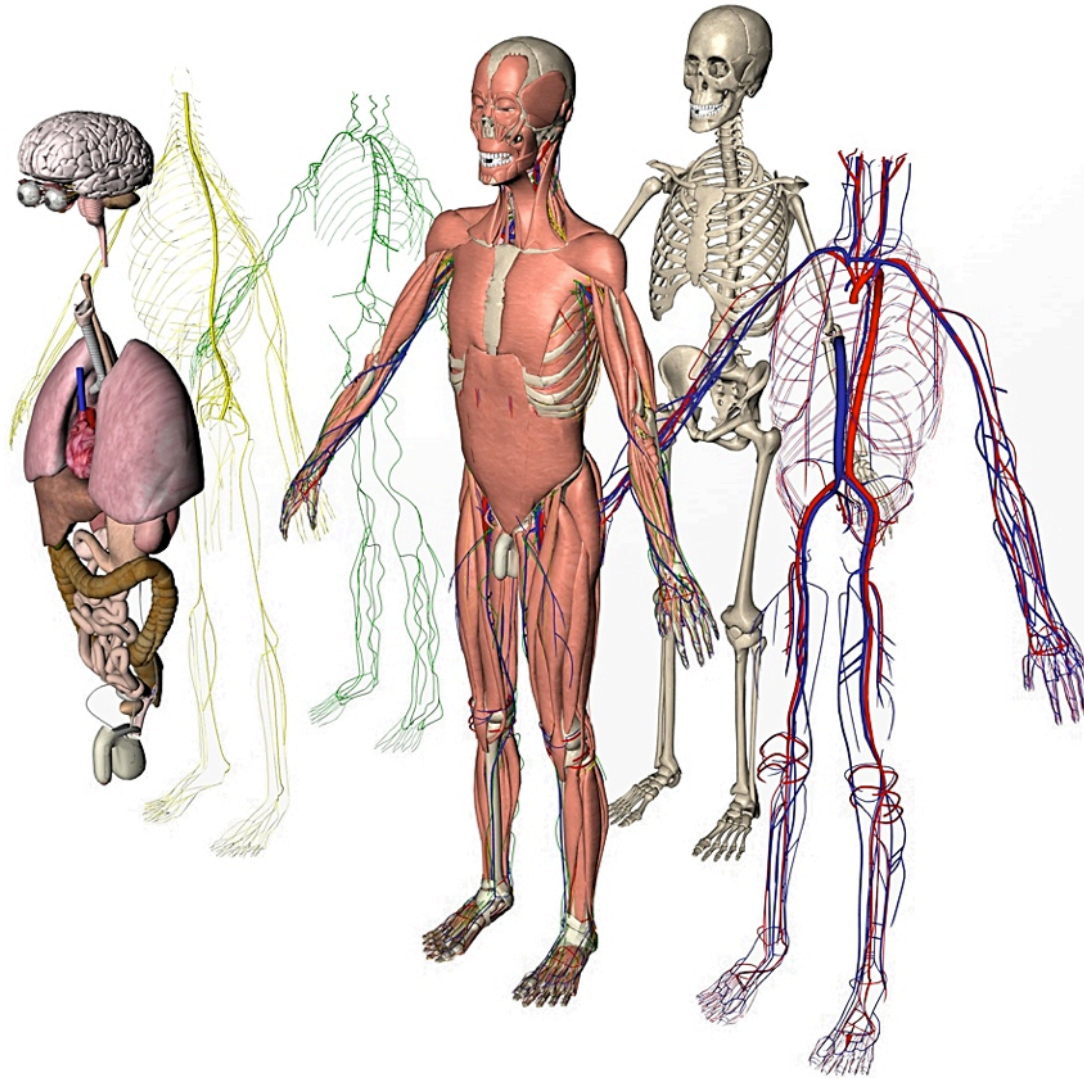
Physical activity

Social contact

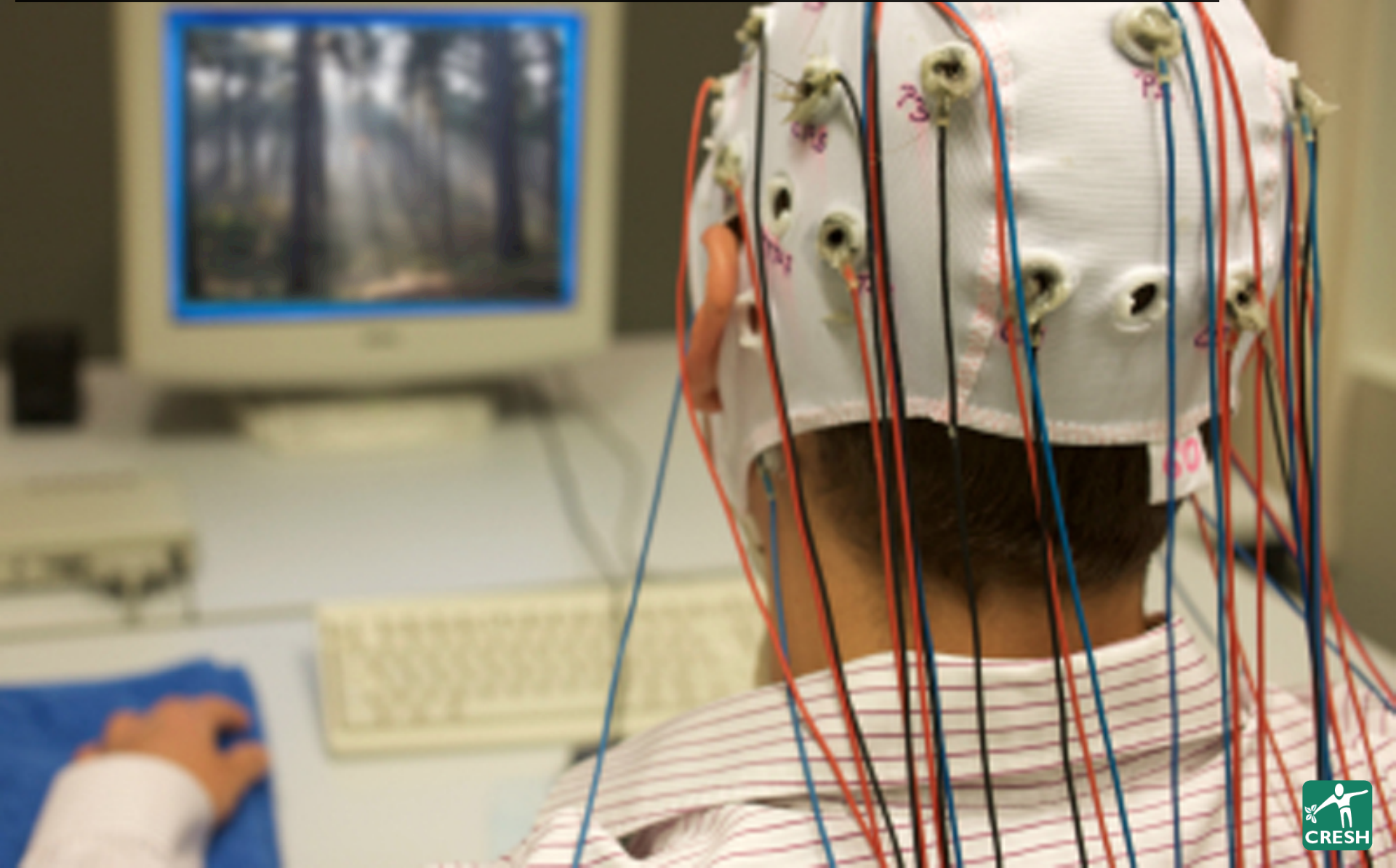
Restoration



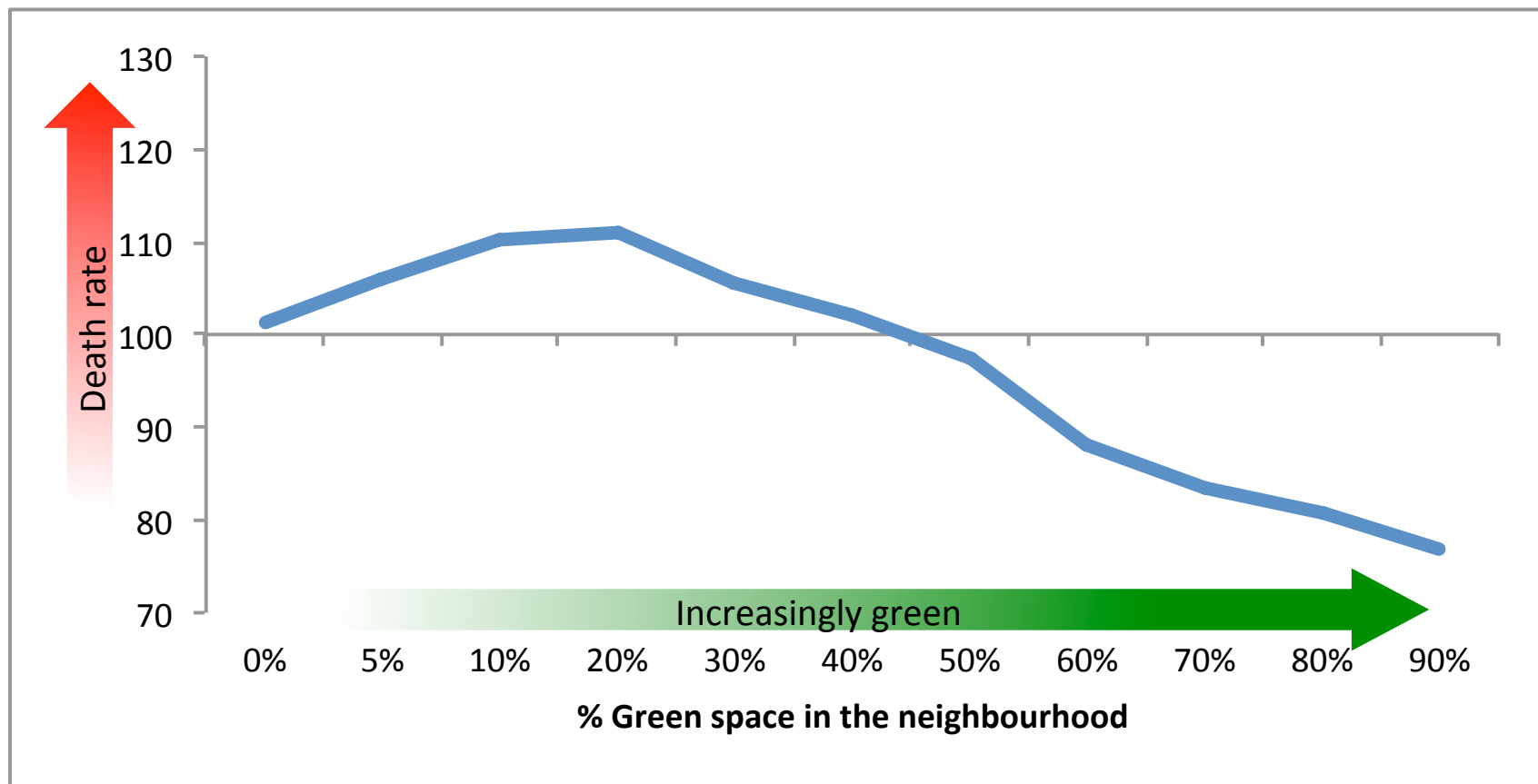
Restoration is a physiological & psychological effect



The evidence for a restorative effect comes primarily from experiments.

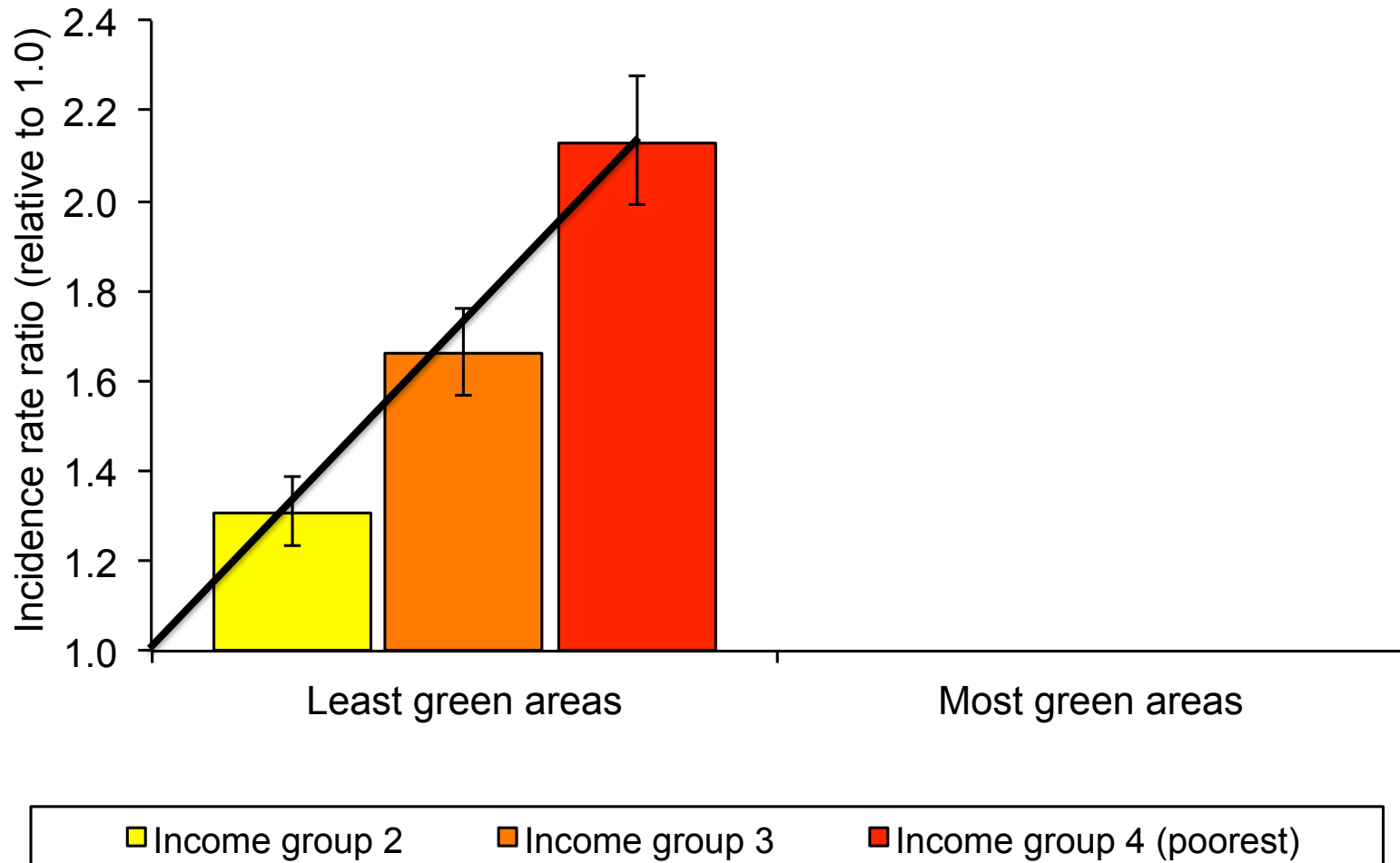


What can nature 'do' for us? The association between access to natural environments and population health.

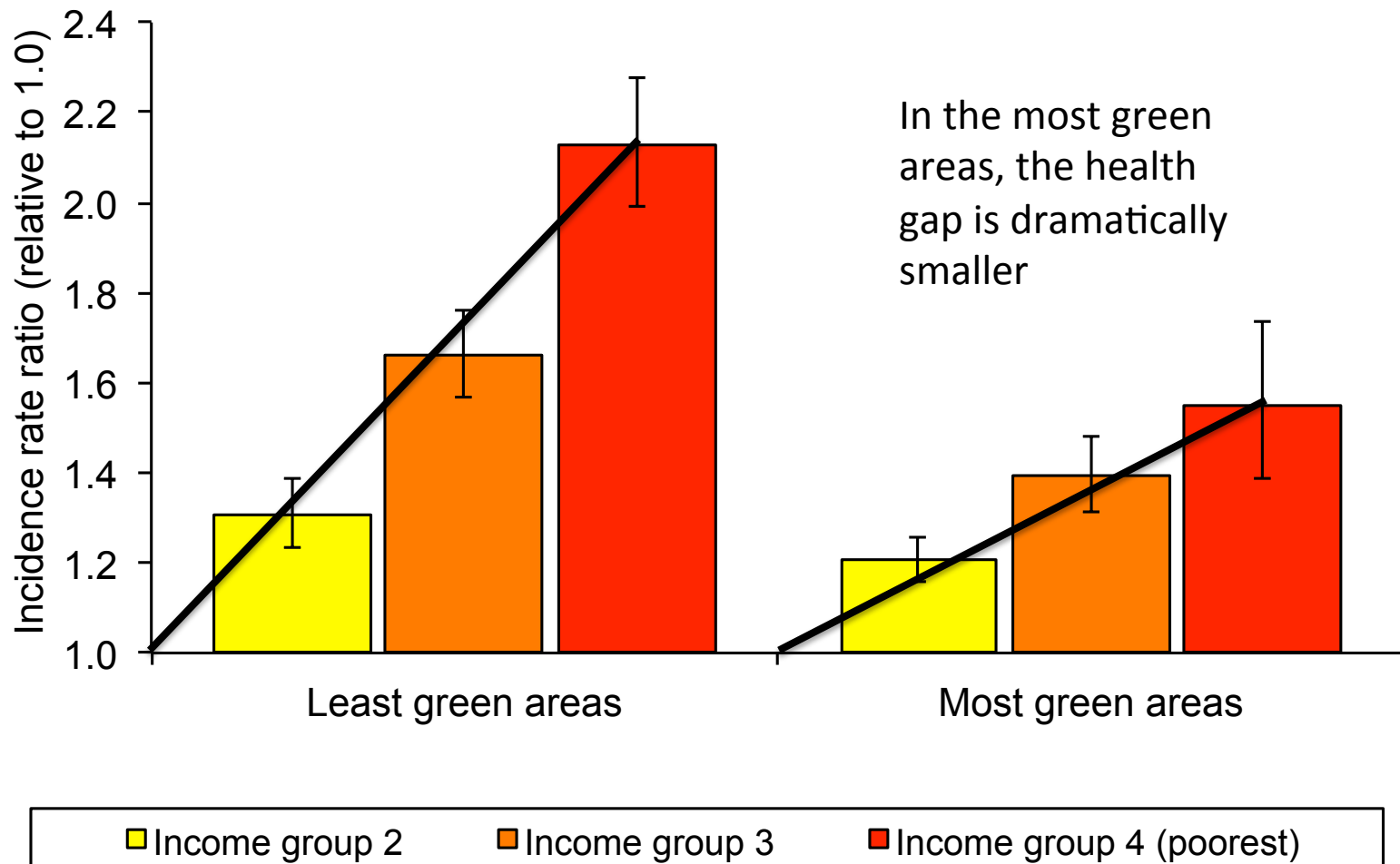


Data are for English urban areas only, deaths from heart disease, ages 30+

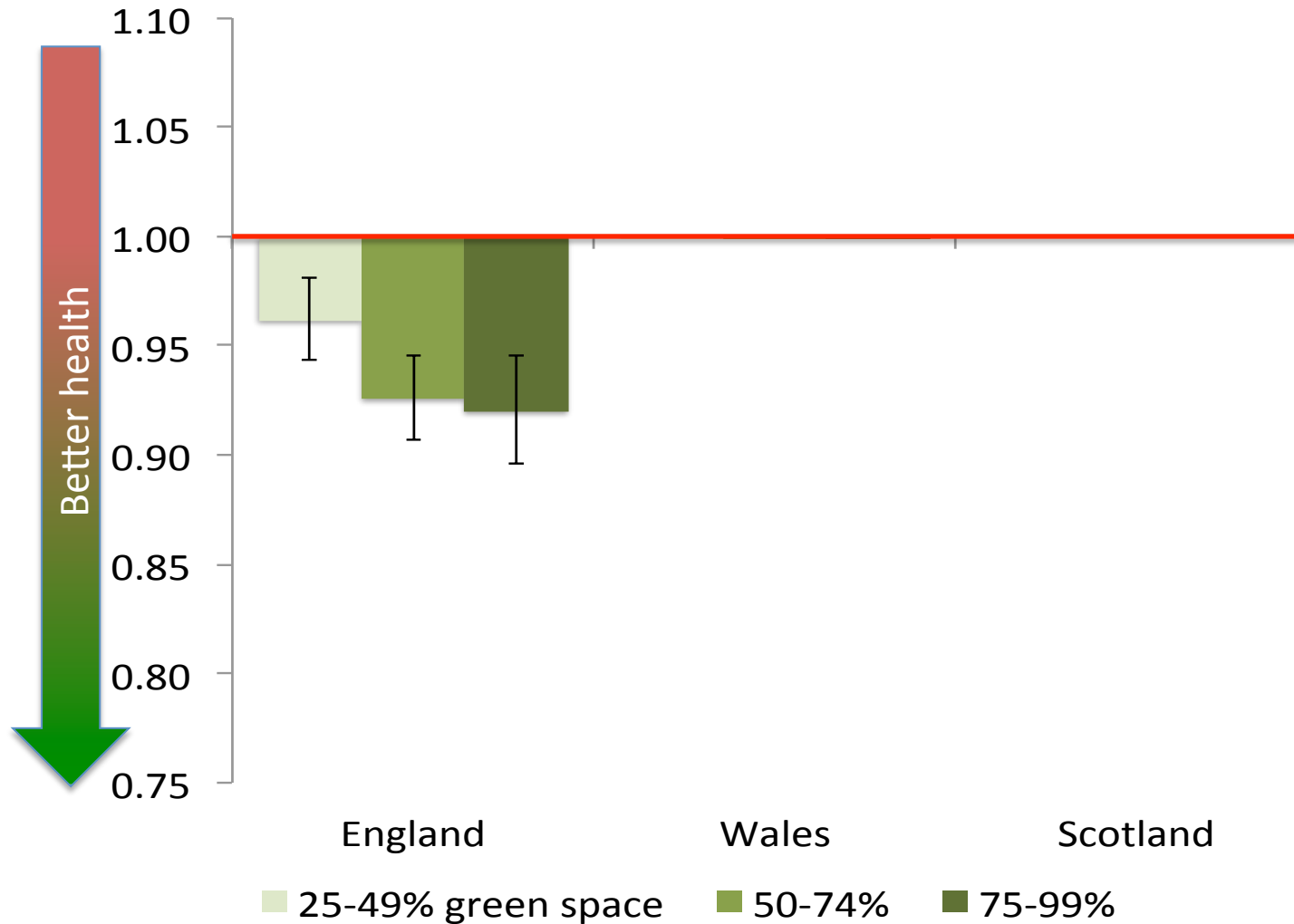
Income-related health inequality may be smaller in greener neighbourhoods.



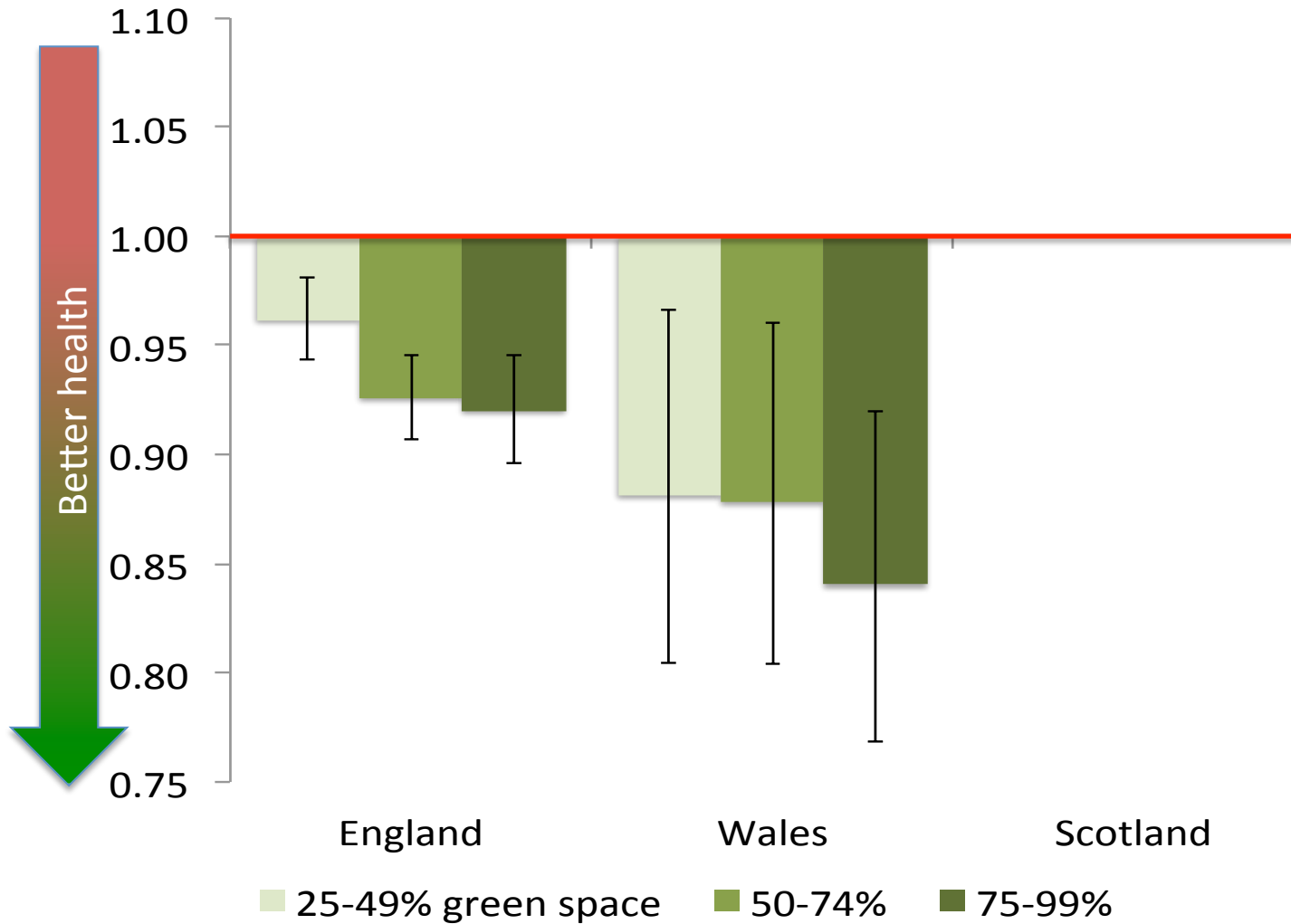
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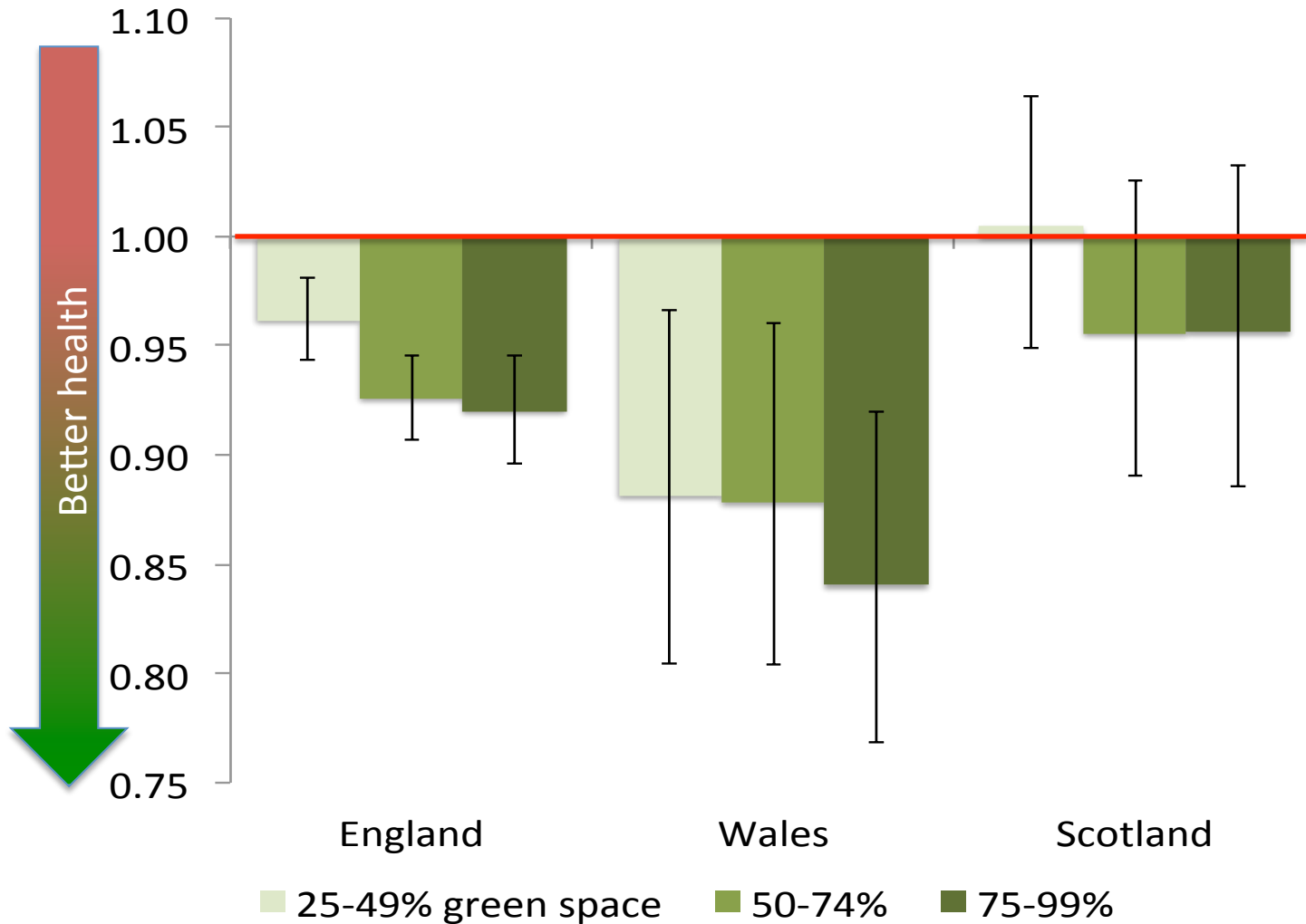
We already knew that greener urban areas in England have lower death rates.



We added analysis of Wales.

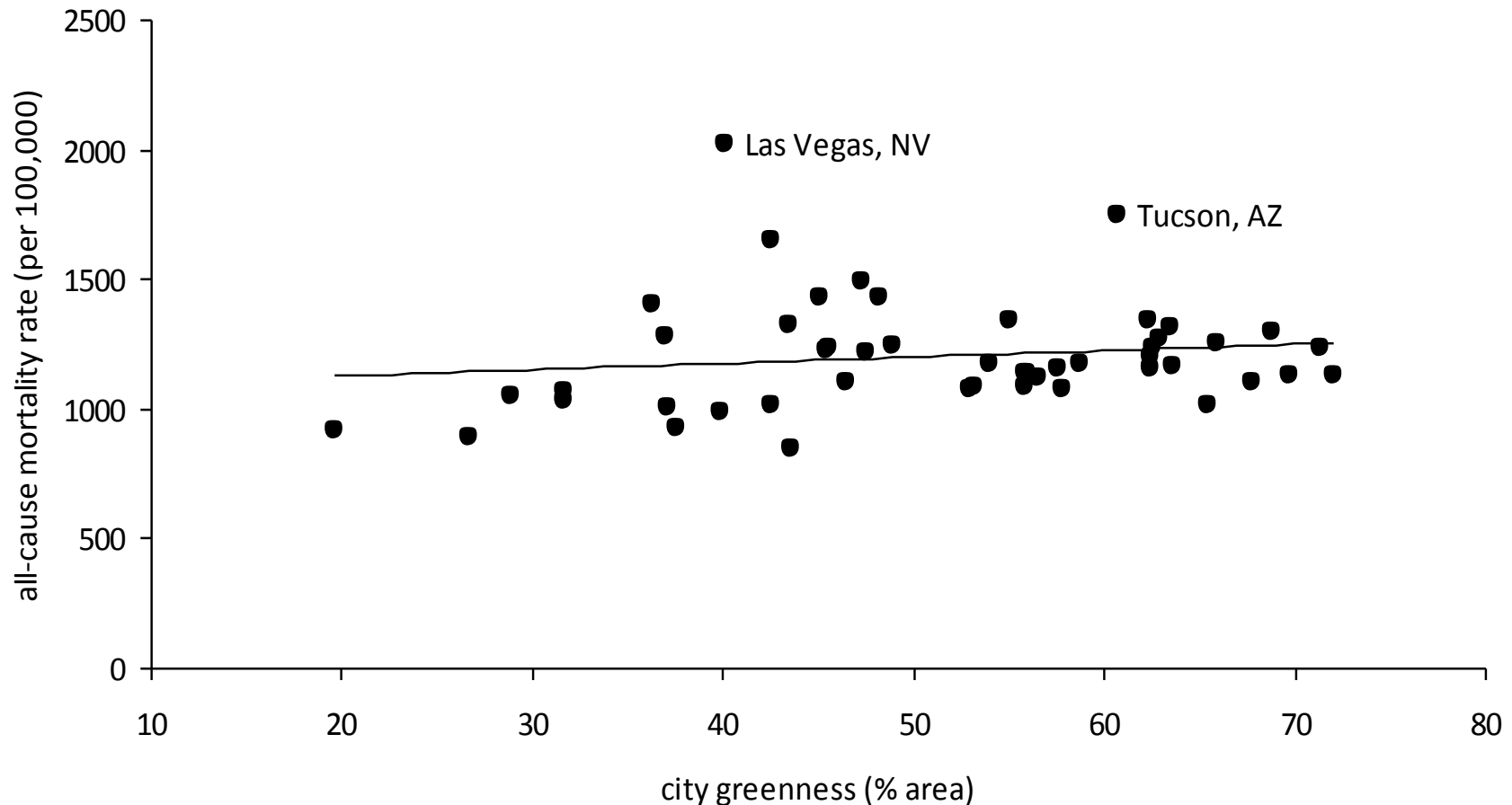


and Scotland! Greener urban neighbourhoods do not have lower mortality rates in Scotland.



Greener cities in the USA actually have slightly higher mortality rates...

(a) Male



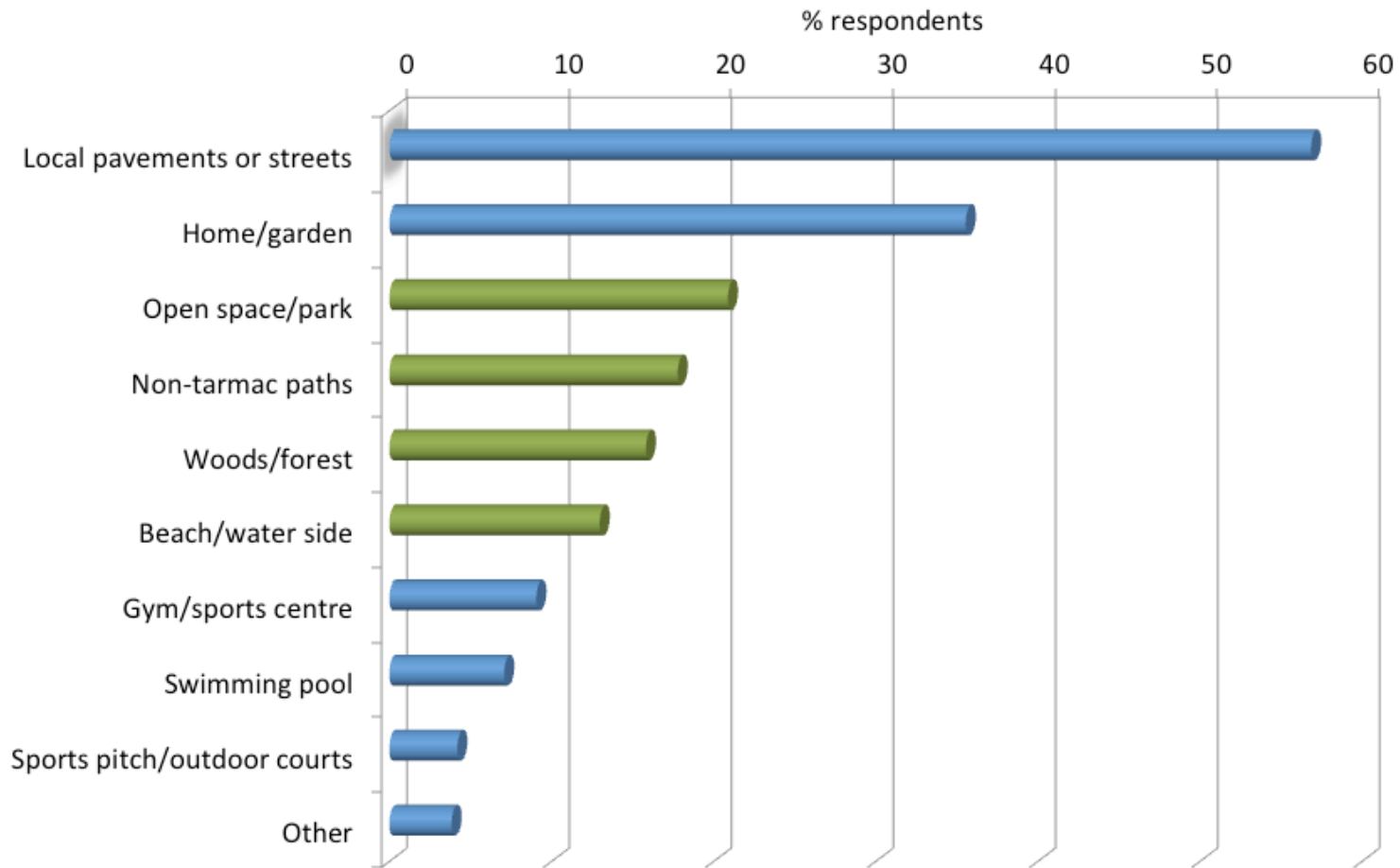


Understanding *use* of green spaces is important.



Where are people physically active?

Use of environment for PA at least once a week in the last 4 weeks





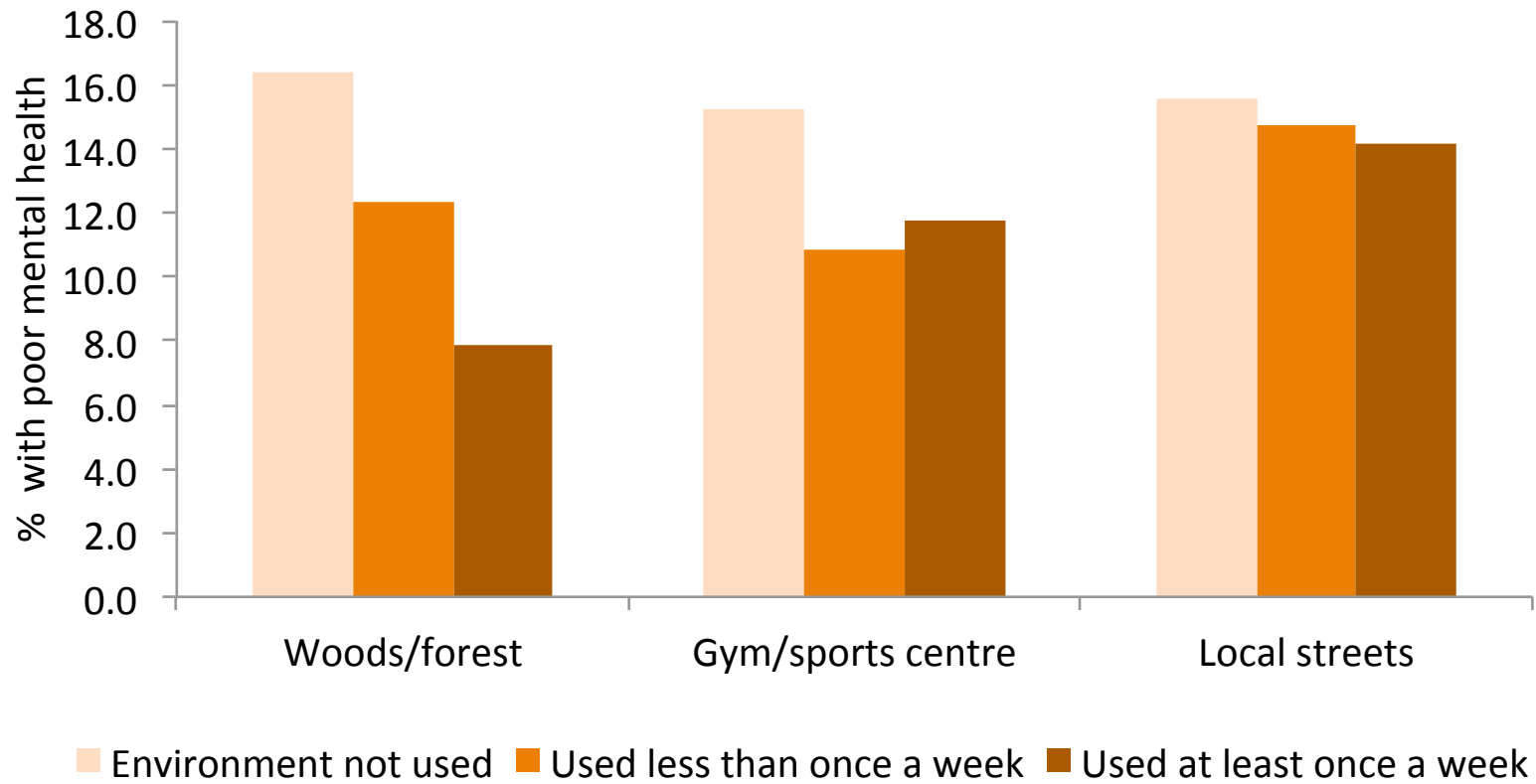
And does that matter in terms of the benefits it brings...?



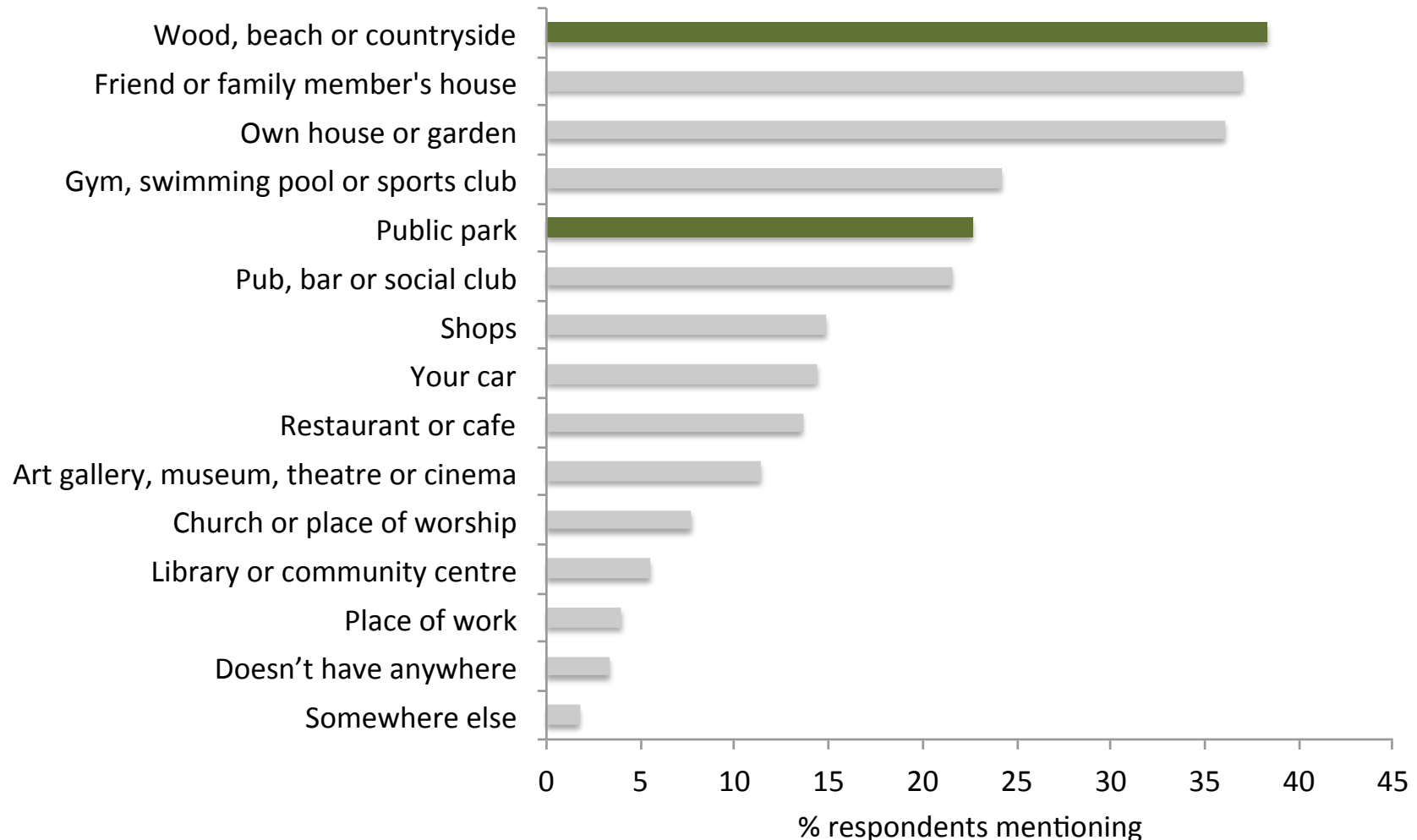
Images: <http://www.jamespot.com/> <http://www.courier-journal.com/>



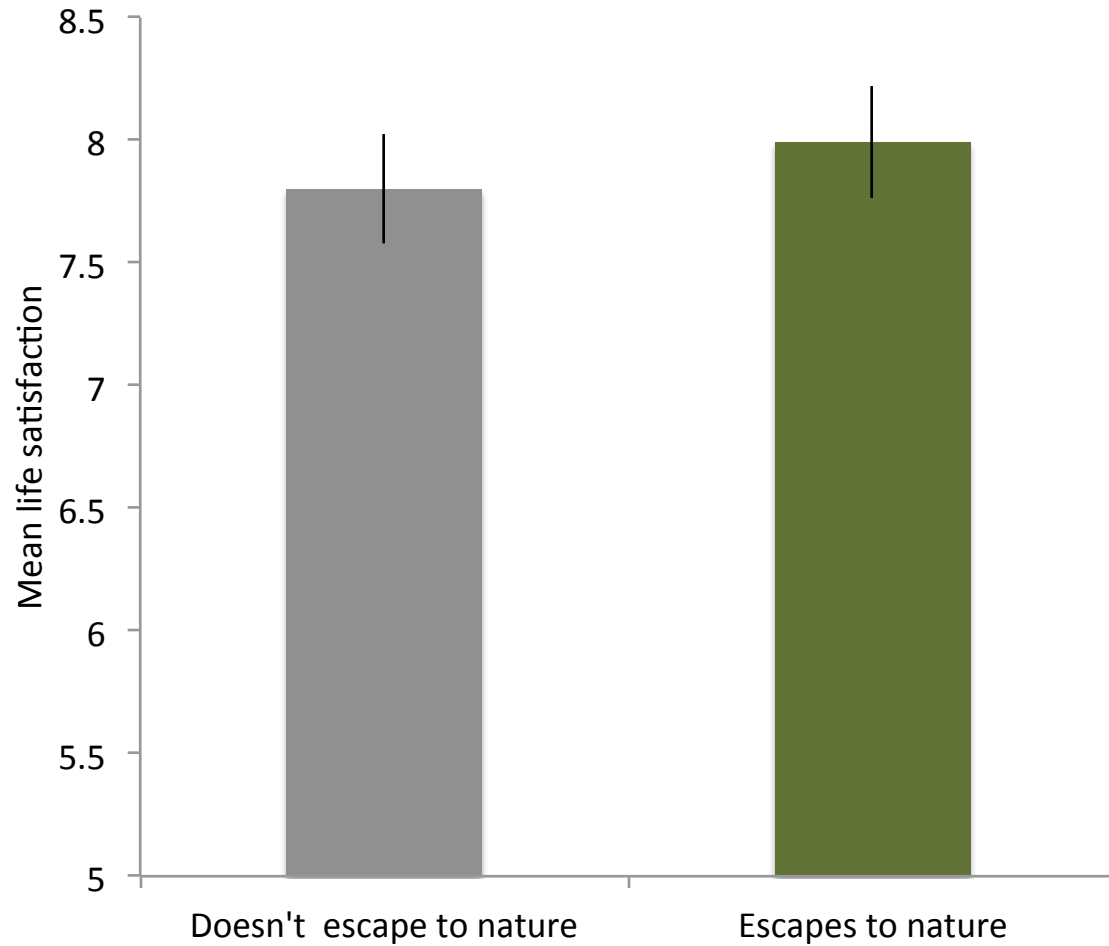
Physical activity in 'natural' environments seems to be 'better' for our mental health than activity elsewhere



Do you ever go to any of these places when you want to escape from everyday problems or stresses?

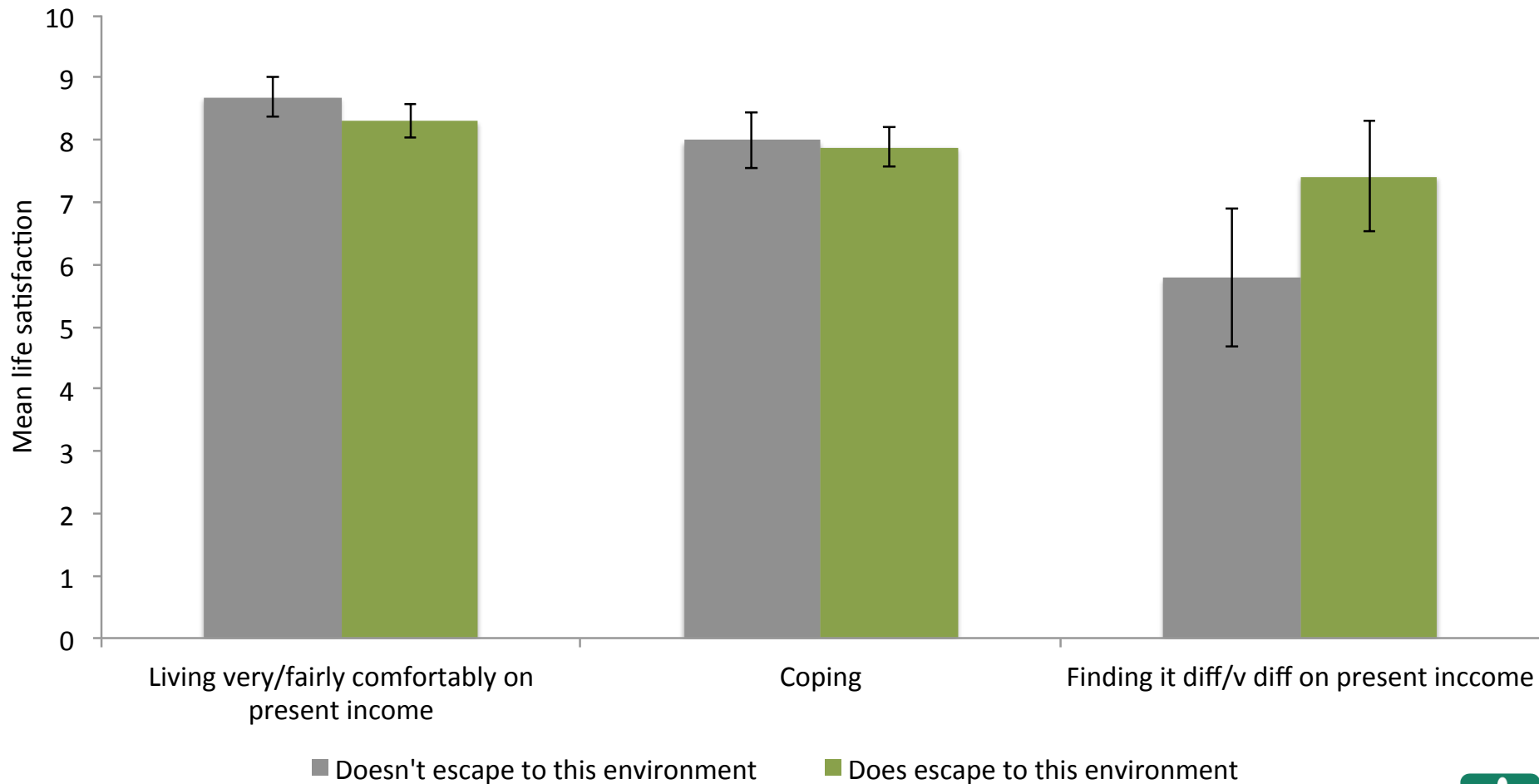


How is this related to life satisfaction? (all those who need to escape)



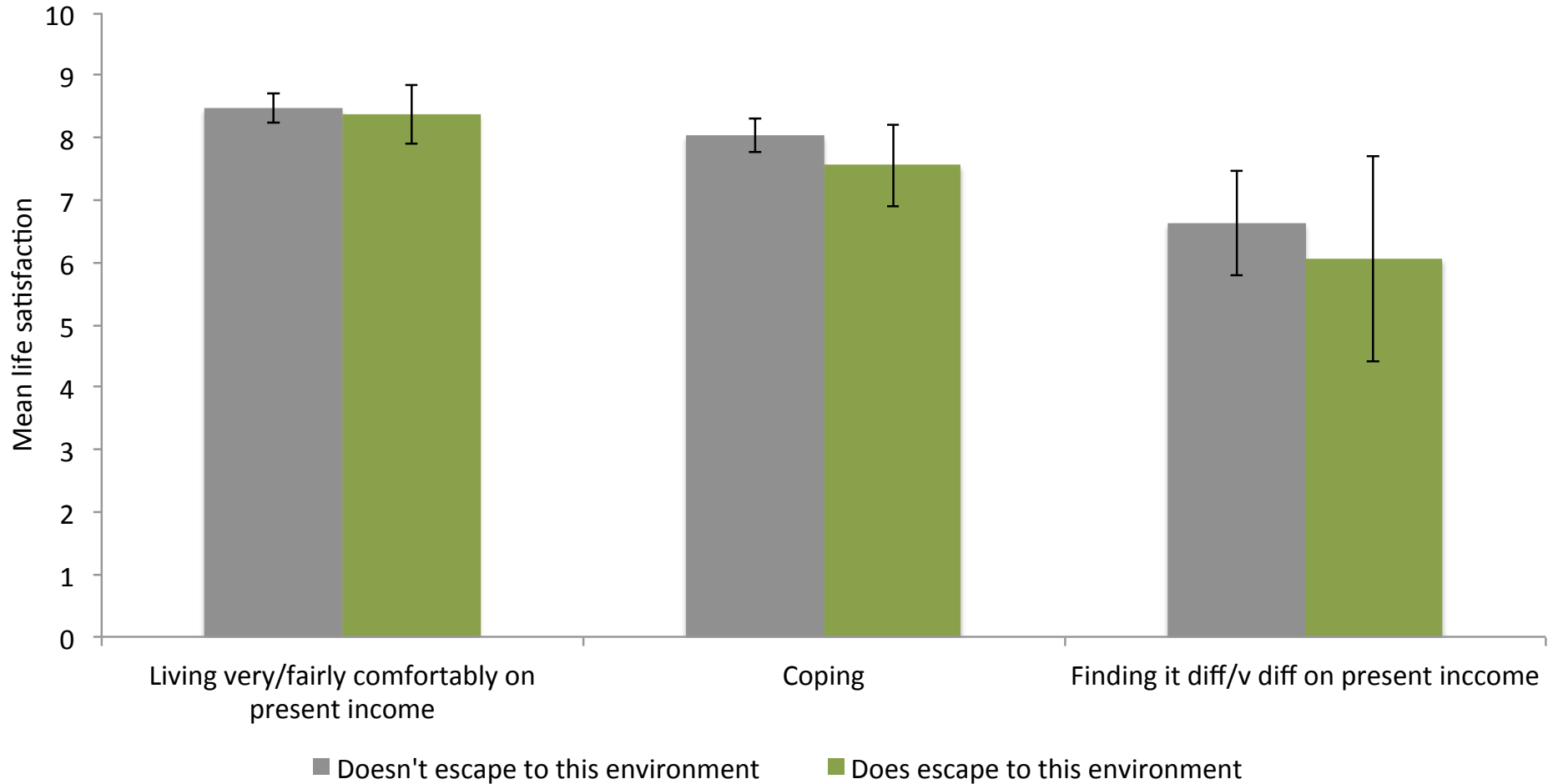
Does escape to nature hold more benefit for those under more stress / more deprived? (NB equalised access to natural environments)

a) Woods, beach or countryside



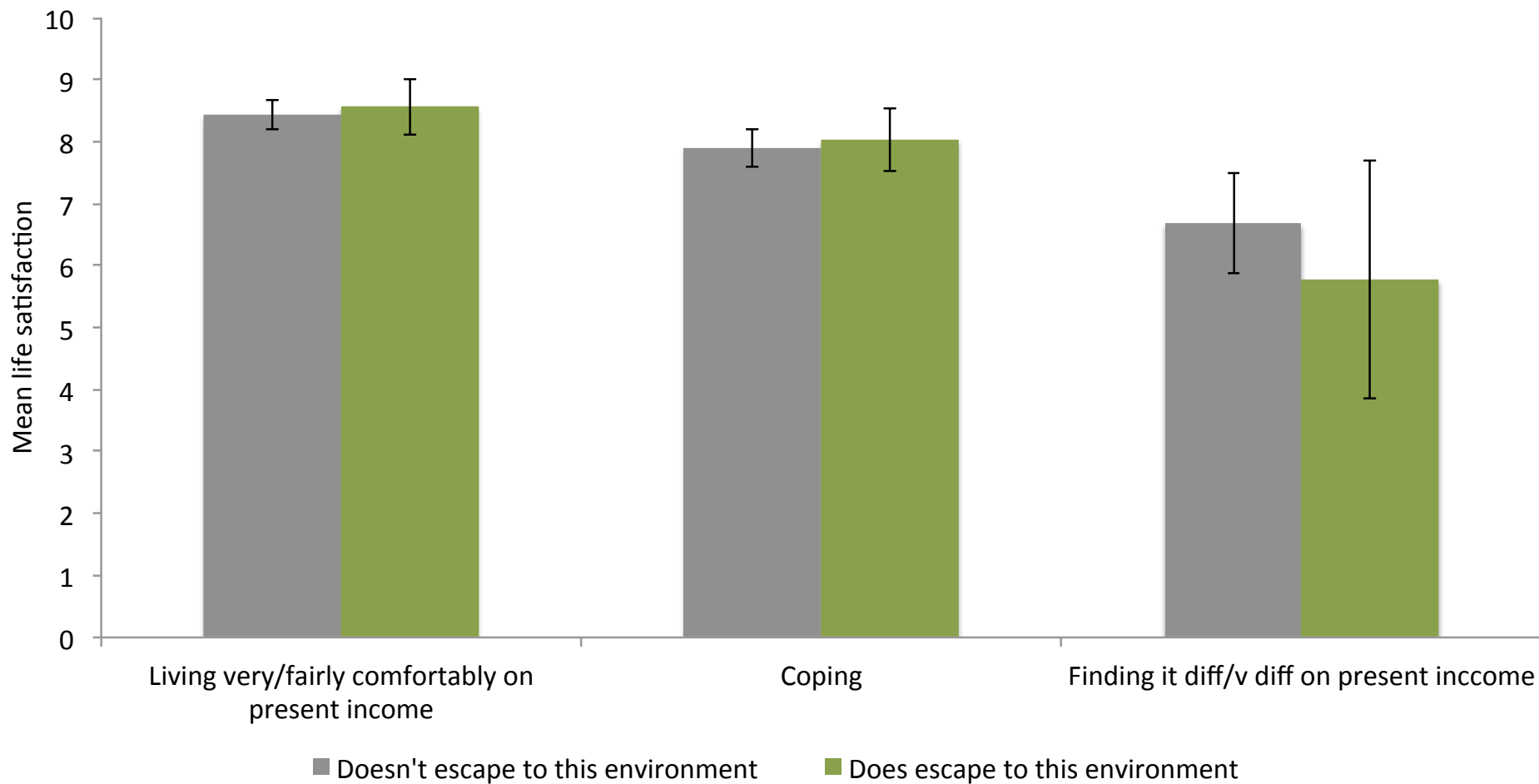
Do other environments have this equalising 'effect'? No.

c) A gym, swimming pool or sports club



Not even the pub or bar 😊

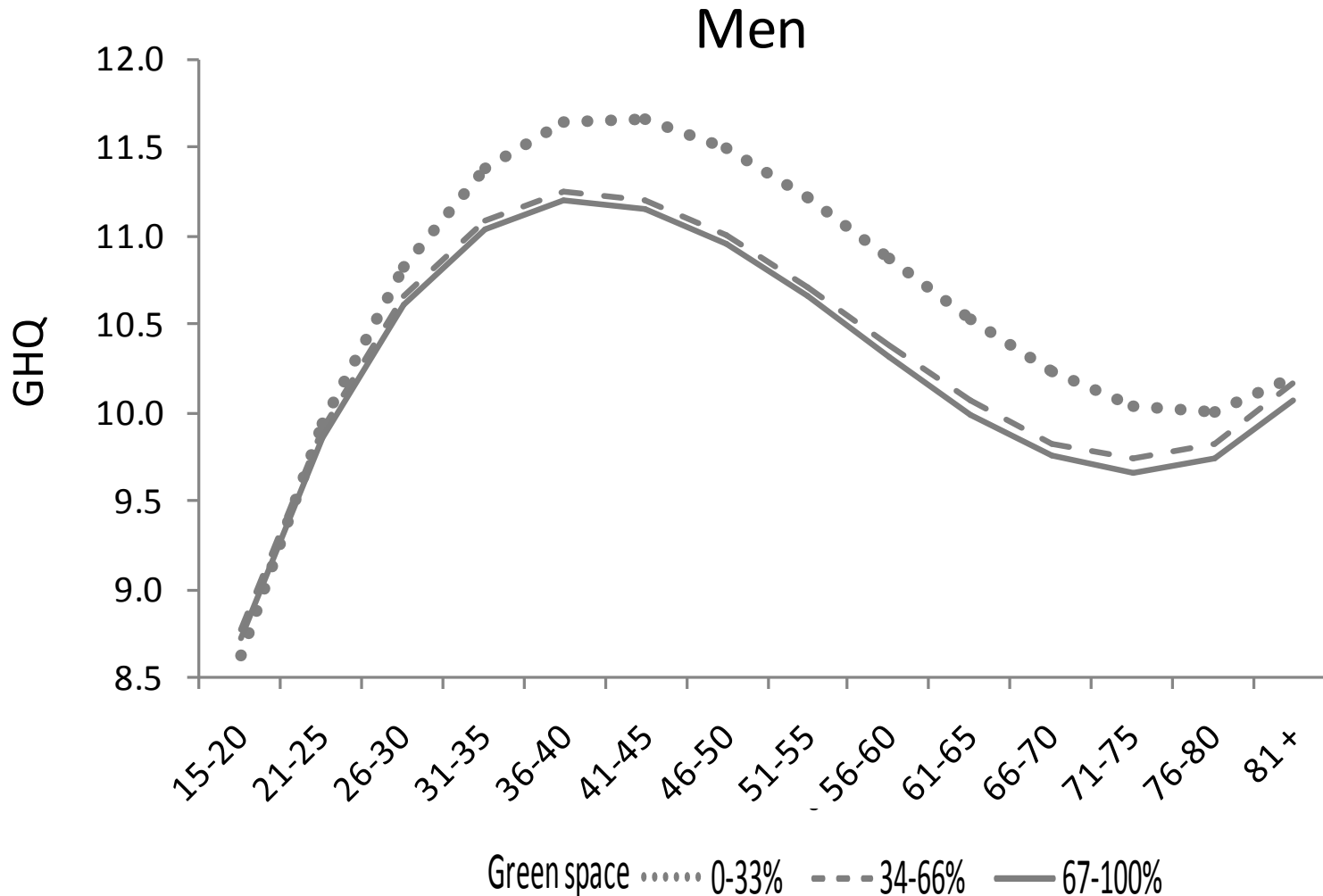
d) The pub



It's likely that the meaning of these environments for our health, and what kinds of space 'work best', will vary across the life span.



Relationships between mental health and neighbourhood green space vary over the life course

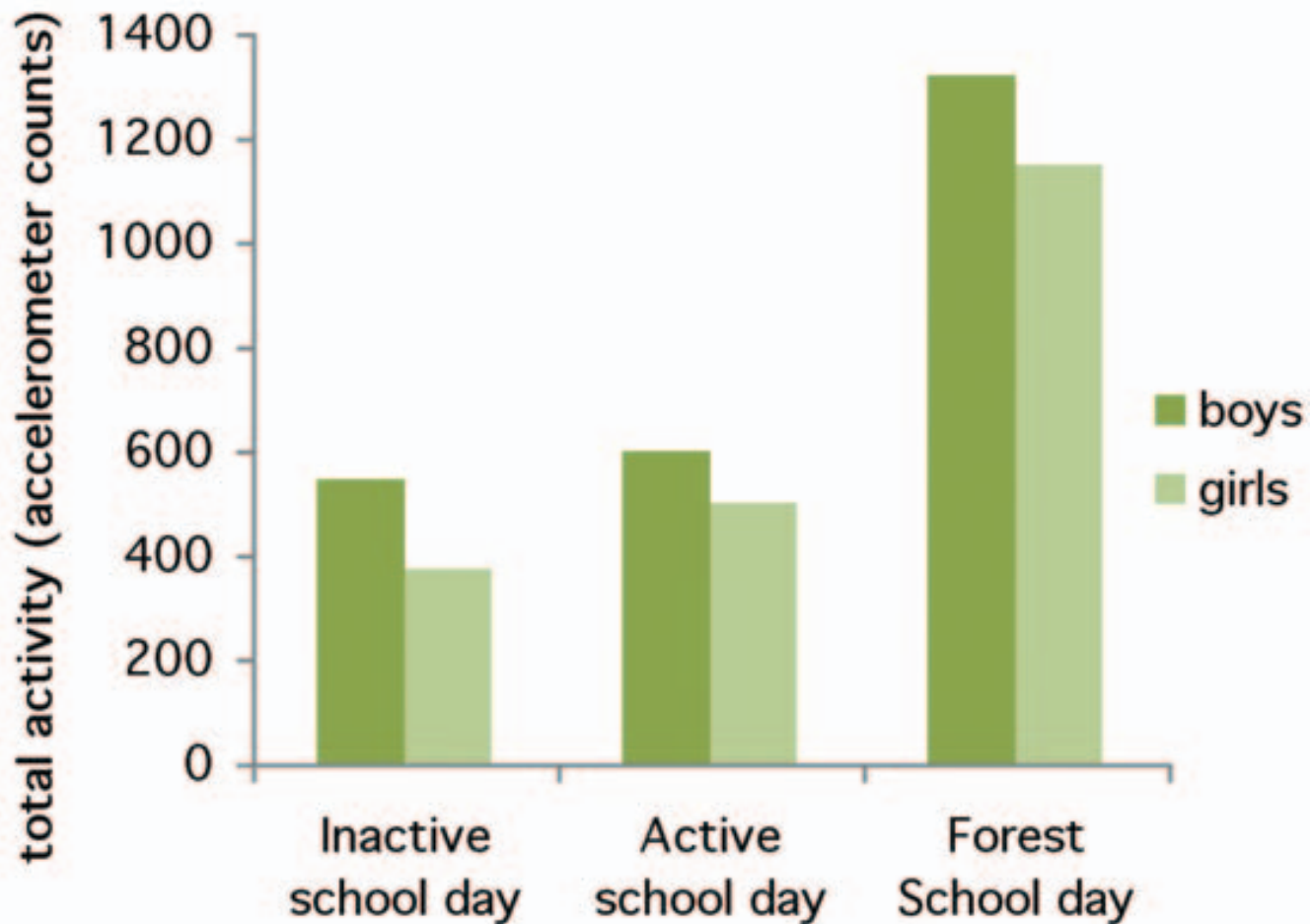




Evidence that childhood experience is important in determining who uses these environments in adulthood.

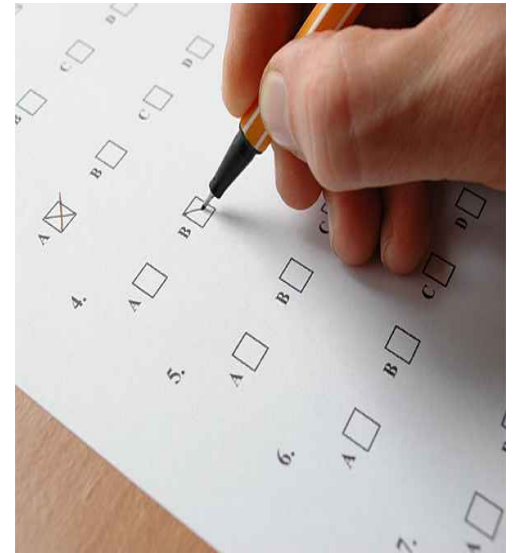
Critiques: for whom are the woods scary? Who doesn't benefit?





The JMA Health Impacts Study

- We followed a group of JMA participants over time
 - Started with about 300
 - Aged 8-18
- They did a questionnaire just before their Award began, again just after it finished and then again an average of 18 months later
- The questionnaires covered a range of attitudes, opinions, behaviours, experience of these kinds of activities, and then in the 2nd and 3rd questionnaire; attitudes to their Award



Key finding 1



- Nearly **1 in 10** of the participants had never been to a wild place before...
- BUT, we found a big difference between those from the poorest backgrounds and those from wealthier backgrounds, in terms of who had never been to wild places before:
 - **About 23% of the poorest kids**
 - About 4% of the others

Key finding 2



- The Award experience led to participants to want visit those environments more
 - This measured in a number of ways...
- This was especially true for those resident in an area comprising the poorest 15% of the Scottish population

Public health is interested in urban natural environments as a means to help keep people well.

There is emerging evidence that these environments are 'equigenic' – they can create/protect health equality.



People who spend time in these places as children, tend to keep doing so as adults.