

# Gardens:

## Opportunities and threats from an occupational perspective.

**Intro:** Our complex relationship with nature has a well documented biological and socio-cultural basis (Berman et al 2008, Bhatti 2006) which when disrupted may have detrimental effects to health and well being. Gardening is an activity of daily living that connects us to nature and can provide a source of identity, pride or embarrassment.

**Research Aims:** This study aimed to explore individual's reaction to the lived or anticipated experience of losing a garden.

**Method:** Quantitative data was collated from the Mass Observation Archive utilising responses from the directive entitled 'You and Gardens' 2007. Thematic analysis was applied to a purposive sample of 103 participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Brighton's School Research Ethics and Governance Panel.

## Findings:

This research highlights four themes:

### Relief

Highlights the fragile link between demand and ability in the occupation of gardening. Where an individual no longer has the capacity to maintain a garden to societal expectations, feelings of anxiety prevail. The relief accompanying no longer having a garden could be ascribed to the reprieve of the judgement of peers.

### Bereavement of place, purpose and product

The loss of a garden provoked strong feelings of bereavement. A place to restore in a physically and emotionally safe environment. The loss of purpose to undertake the meaningful occupation of cultivation. The loss of the products which cultivation can yield.

### Restriction

The power of a garden to contribute to an individual's sense of wellbeing and freedom is such that often merely the knowledge that it is accessible is enough to repress feelings of restriction.

### Coping strategies

The importance of cultivation as an occupation is reflected in the numerous coping strategies respondents described for managing the loss of a garden. Continuing to garden despite the loss of a garden reflects the benefits this occupation can bestow.

**Discussion:** The findings demonstrate the complex nature of individuals' relationships with their gardens. The threats and opportunities a garden presents is largely influenced by the personal meaning and socio-cultural value individuals place on a garden. These findings support the current literature and the concept of occupational deprivation (Wilcock 2006); that when individuals are unable to engage in meaningful occupations due to external restrictions, then self efficacy, identity and overall well being can suffer.

**Conclusion:** Highlights the opportunities a garden presents as a therapeutic medium. Exploring the effects of not having access to a garden enables occupational therapists to deeply understand the opportunities and threats a garden presents.

**Implications for Practice:** This research highlights concerns raised by the potential loss of this private, precious space before it happens. Overall the practical relocation of individuals away from their gardens raises the notion of occupational justice and the role of gardens in providing an equal and fair society.

Private gardens provide a free medium for occupational therapy intervention, this has the potential to reduce strain on an overstretched healthcare budget whilst enabling people to manage things they no longer felt possible.

#### References:

1. Berman MG, Jonides J, Kaplan S (2008) The cognitive benefits of interacting with nature. *Psychological Science*, 19, 1207-1212.
  2. Bhatti M (2006) 'When I'm in the garden I can create my own paradise': Homes and gardens in later life. *The Sociological Review*, 54(2) 318-341.
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