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Information about the abstract

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Abstract title: Ocean health in Belgium: Living near the coast is associated with better health

Abstract: Natural environments have long been associated with health risks, but potential benefits for health and wellbeing are only recently being explored. Similar to green spaces, coastal areas provide a good environmental quality with opportunities for healthy social and physical activities (e.g. in the context of blue tourism), allowing to improve mental (e.g. less stress) and physical health. However, evidence linking residential proximity to the coast with human health and wellbeing is scarce. The present study investigated whether Belgian citizens living closer to the coast report better health. Therefore, linear regression models were applied on data from the Belgian Health Interview Survey (n = 60,939; 52% female, all ages). Our results were standardized for demographic (e.g. age, having a chronic disease, income, smoking status, physical activity, social interactions, etc.) and environmental parameters (urbanization level, % blue space and green space in the area and air quality as PM₁₀ and NO₂ concentrations). Citizens living close to the coast (< 5 km) reported 3.7 % better subjective health than citizens from the hinterland (> 250 km). Although people living at 20-50 km reported highest scores for vitality (SF-36 score), people living in close proximity to the sea (< 5 km) also reported 5.7 % better vitality than people from the hinterland (> 250 km). Changes in psychosocial stress (GHQ-12 score) with proximity to the coast were less strong. This is the first evidence of a positive association between proximity to the coast and the physical and mental human health and wellbeing in Belgium. Our results endorse similar findings from the UK.

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