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Stress rehabilitation through garden therapy: The garden as a place in the recovery from stress

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Abstract

In a rehabilitation programme for people with stress disorder, a garden room can be an important ingredient. Stress disorder has been the most common cause of sick leave in Sweden since the 1990s. The study is about the therapeutic role of nature in the form of a garden, as participants experienced it during the recovery process. The research subjects were on sick leave due to stress related symptoms and took part in rehabilitation at the Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden in southern Sweden. The article is based on interviews with five participants who describe their experiences of garden therapy and what they perceive as essential for their recovery. The garden was associated with many positive experiences of interacting with people and greenery and perceived as a safe and useful arena in their recovery. The participants described how nature affords positive sensory experiences, physical and psychological well-being, but also how nature and the

garden facilitate beneficial social interactions with other participants and caregivers. Importance was also allocated to the symbolism of nature as associated to one's own growth and the passing of time. They conceptualised the recovery process as initiated by more traditional forms of therapies but reinforced and consolidated by the access to nature and the garden rooms. In a dynamic psychological perspective on place, the study illustrates the potential role of using nature as a venue to facilitate self-regulation of physiological, psychological and social needs.



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Keywords

Exhaustion disorder; Garden therapy; Health promotion; Horticultural therapy; Place attachment; Restoration

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