

Review

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[Helena Ribeiro](#) \* , [Keila Valente de Souza Santana](#) , Sofia Lizarralde Oliver

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Review

# Natural Environments in University Campuses and Students' Well-Being

Helena Ribeiro <sup>1,\*</sup>, Keila Valente de Souza Santana <sup>2</sup> and Sofia Lizarralde Oliver <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Environmental Health. Faculdade de Saúde Pública. Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil; lena@usp.br

<sup>2</sup> Department of Environmental Health. Faculdade de Saúde Pública. Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil; keilla@usp.br

<sup>3</sup> Department of Environmental Health. Faculdade de Saúde Pública. Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil; sofia.lizarralde@gmail.com

\* Correspondence: lena@usp.br; Tel.: 55 11 30617894

**Abstract:** Most recent university campuses follow the North American model, built on city limits or countryside, with large separate buildings in open green spaces. Studies suggest that prevalence and severity of mental health issues among university students are increasing over the past decade in most countries. University services were created to face this growing problem, however individual based interventions have limited effects on mental health and well-being of a large population. Our aim was to verify if and how the natural environment in Campuses is focused on programs to cope with the issue of mental health and well-being among students. Systematic review of literature was undertaken with search in Scopus and LILACS with the keywords "green areas" AND "well-being" AND "Campus", following PRISMA guidelines. As a result, 32 articles were selected. Research on the topic is recent, mostly in the USA, Bulgaria, and China. Most studies used objective information on campuses' greenness and/or university students' perception. Mental health was usually measured by validated scores. Findings of all the studies indicated positive association between campus greenery and well-being of students. We conclude that there is a large potential for use of university campuses in programs and sites for students' restoration and stress relief.

**Keywords:** mental health; well-being; university campus; greenness; nature-based solutions

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## 1. Introduction

Most of the more recent university campuses follow the North American model. They are built on the limits of the city or the countryside, with large separate buildings, implanted in open green spaces, along avenues and streets [1].

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, in the field of pedagogy, the New School movement has spread throughout the world. This movement demanded a profound renewal in the school environment, associated with a change in the way the teacher-exercised authority. The proposed changes included transforming school buildings into more horizontal ones, so that they would become more open to nature [2]. In kindergarten and primary education, the principles of free movement of children and access to the outdoors and nature have been adopted in many countries. In Brazil, Anísio Teixeira defended the park-school with two periods, in which in one of the periods, in a large, wooded space, children performed physical, social, and artistic activities [3]. Teixeira was a mentor to educators, such as Darcy Ribeiro, who became Minister of Education.

At the university level, these principles were not so evident, but the heritage of the architectural design, with horizontal buildings and large green areas between them, was maintained.

University campuses, the majority characterized by having extensive lawns and green spaces, cause large expenditures for their maintenance, but are scarcely used as recreation or leisure areas for the well-being and mental health of students or the surrounding community. Our hypothesis is

that there is a large potential for their use as a natural environment for the well-being of students, teaching, office staff, and the general community.

On a university campus, greenness can include trees, vegetation lawn, bushes, etc. that flank pathways and roads, and exist in spaces between buildings [4], and water bodies consisting of blue spaces [5].

Student quality of life is a complex composite of physical health, psychological state, and relationships with their surrounding cultural, social, and environmental context [6] and it is an important precursor for learning and success in college [4].

University students face a series of academic, interpersonal, financial, and cultural challenges that may cause psychological and other health problems. Students' stress may result also from difficult daily targets, long study hours, bad relationships with classmates, emotional distress, loss of self-identity and low self-esteem [7]. Many of the young adults who attend universities face their first prolonged period away from home. This change in environment, combined with academic, social, and financial pressures can be stressful with impact on the physical status and wellness of students [8,9]. Ibes et al. (2018) reaffirm that mental health crisis is particularly pronounced on college campuses, where students encounter life stressors as academic and extracurricular demands, relationships, financial concerns, family expectations, identity development, and racial and cultural differences [9]. Digital overload exacerbates chronic stress and anxiety, as college students tend to spend many hours a day on smartphones, tablets, computers, and television. Even when students do not live on campus, they tend to spend most of the day on campus, due to academic tasks.

Studies suggest that prevalence and severity of mental health issues among university students are increasing over the past decade in North America [10], in China [7] and many other countries around the world [4], becoming a widespread problem that was aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic [11,12]. This trend is apparently similar in low and middle-income countries (LMIC). As example, in Brazil, young adults (18 to 29 years old) represent the group with the lowest percentage of depression (5.9% in 2019) but presented the largest increase in diagnoses of depression from 2013 to 2019, 51%. Suicide rate among age group 20 to 39, increased from 6.73 to 8.19 per 100,000 inhabitants in the same period [13].

According to WHO (2017) the most common mental health disorders, because of their high prevalence, are depression and anxiety. The first is characterized by symptoms such as sadness, low interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, changes in sleep or appetite pattern, sensation of tiredness and low concentration. The second presents symptoms as anxiety, fear, panic, phobias, obsessive-compulsive behavior, and post-traumatic stress [14]. On top of these two common disorders, suicide ideation and suicide attempt have become a serious problem among university students. The transition between childhood and adulthood is characterized by rapid physical, psychological, and cognitive developments and lays the foundation for future mental health and resilience. An estimated 70% of mental health problems first appear during this development period [15].

Many university services have been created to face this growing problem; however, interventions based in individuals have limited effects on mental health and well-being of a large population. Besides, although many universities offer mental health treatment and counseling programs, a vast majority of students are reluctant to use them due to personal and public stigma [16]. Ibes et al. (2018) reinforce that universities may address this crisis in traditional ways, such as counseling staff and mental health programming [9]. Yet an accessible, simple, and affordable tool for relieving stress, as greenspace, is overlooked. Considering that mental health issues are complex and need a holistic approach, Windhorst & Williams (2016) argue that strategies should include campus environments, as social inclusivity, students' safety, support services, but also the natural environment as an important dimension of mental health. In their view, this absence is striking in studies and in real health policies in Latin America [10].

Our first aim was to focus our study on Latin America's campuses. However, a first literature search in Scopus and Web of Science showed no studies on the relation between university students' well-being or mental health and green spaces.

Wolf et al. (2020), on their scoping review of literature on Urban Trees and Human Health, point that, of 201 studies analyzed, only 1 was based in Mexico, and 1% were undertaken in South America [17]. This indicates that the studies on the effects of the natural environment on health are still scarce in Latin America.

According to Liu et al. (2018), there are two main theoretical perspectives related to the restorative effects of restorative environments: a. The Psycho-evolutionary theory holds that viewing the natural environment can improve the mood of people and mitigate stress by blocking out pessimistic thoughts and ruminations. b. The Attention Restoration Theory (ART) holds that intensive or prolonged focus leads to exhaustion of mental capacity and that directed attention capabilities can be restored by contact with nature [7]. According to ART, the natural environment should exhibit four types of characteristics to assist in this process: a sense of escape or being away from daily's routine; extent to invoke imagination [as in a forest trail]; fascination; and be compatible with the desires of the individual. Maximum benefit is obtained when all four are present [18]. Some authors emphasize that, according to the biophilia-hypothesis, humans have developed and maintained an affinity for nature throughout their evolution, which makes positive outcomes from exposure to green spaces on the human body and mind stand to reason [19]. Other authors emphasize mediators of this process as: reduced exposure to air pollution, heat island, and noise; and encouraging of health-enhancing behaviors such as physical activity and social interactions [5].

Thus, we aimed to verify if and how the natural environment is approached in scientific literature on well-being in university campuses, and how it is being focused on programs and policies to cope with the growing issue of mental health among university students. To address this objective, a systematic literature review was undertaken to assess the extent, range, and nature of research in this topic area.

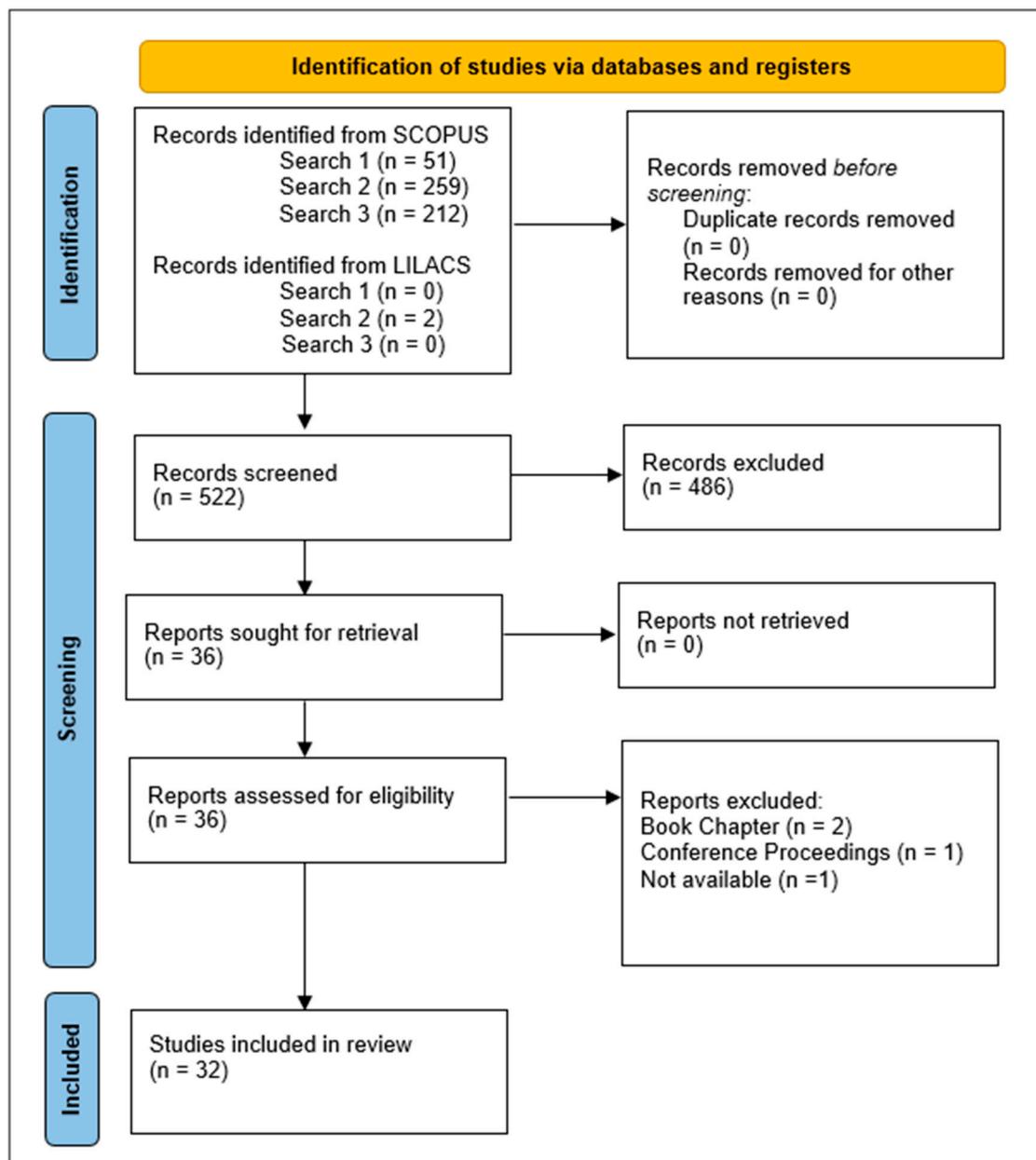
## 2. Materials and Methods

Method adopted was a Systematic review of literature. Search was undertaken in the basis Web of Science, Scopus, LILACS and SciELO with the keywords: "green areas" AND "well-being" AND "Campus" and variations with the words "green areas" for "greenness", as well as translation to the words to Portuguese: "áreas verdes" AND "bem-estar" AND "campus universitário", and Spanish: "espacios verdes" AND "bien-vivir" AND "campus universitário". First results indicated 7 documents in Scopus, none regarding university students or young adults; and 49 in Web of Science, of these 16 focused on the relation of mental health and greenspace in Latin American context, but none focused on college students or young adults.

As no manuscript was found regarding studies in Latin America, our investigation focused on any region of the world. In this way, three search strings were selected, which were later systematized: "greenness" OR "green areas" AND "university campus" called Search one; the second: "greenness" OR "green areas" AND "mental health" called Search 2 and the third: "university campus" AND "mental health" called Search 3.

This was necessary because the use of the three words concomitantly did not return any results, even without the limitation of a geographical area. Then the searches were separated and the relations between their results were made manually. After reading the abstracts obtained in the three searches by the three authors, 36 articles were selected by consensus, of which 4 were discarded, two of them because they were book chapters, 1 because it was an abstract in meeting proceedings and 1 article whose text was not available, leaving 32 studies for analysis. The Inclusion criteria used was the simultaneous presence of the terms of each search in the title, or in the abstract or in the keywords. And as exclusion criteria, the following were stipulated: absence of simultaneity of the terms of each search in the title or abstract or in the keywords, articles with a study population outside the young adult age group, articles that dealt with botanical or faunal issues, sanitation, or other aspects of the university campus, without association with student's health. Articles that associated greenness with health issues unrelated to well-being or mental health were also discarded.

The PRISMA guidelines [20] were used to organize and systematize the search and results, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Search and results according PRISMA guidelines.

### 3. Results

As described in the Methods, in total, 32 articles were found. Of these, only two studies were published before the year 2015, in China (2009) and the United States (2014), showing that it is a recent topic in the scientific literature.

In 2016 and 2017, one paper was published in the U.S. and one in South Africa. From 2018, 6 studies were found, 4 in Bulgaria, 1 in the USA, and 1 in China. From 2019, 3 studies: in Bulgaria, Turkey, and Canada. From 2020, there were 5 studies, with expansion to other countries. The theme, of recent interest, is also limited to a few countries in the world, as can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. The United States, Bulgaria and China stand out in terms of number of studies, with the exception that in Bulgaria the studies are concentrated in one research group.

## Studies 2009-2023

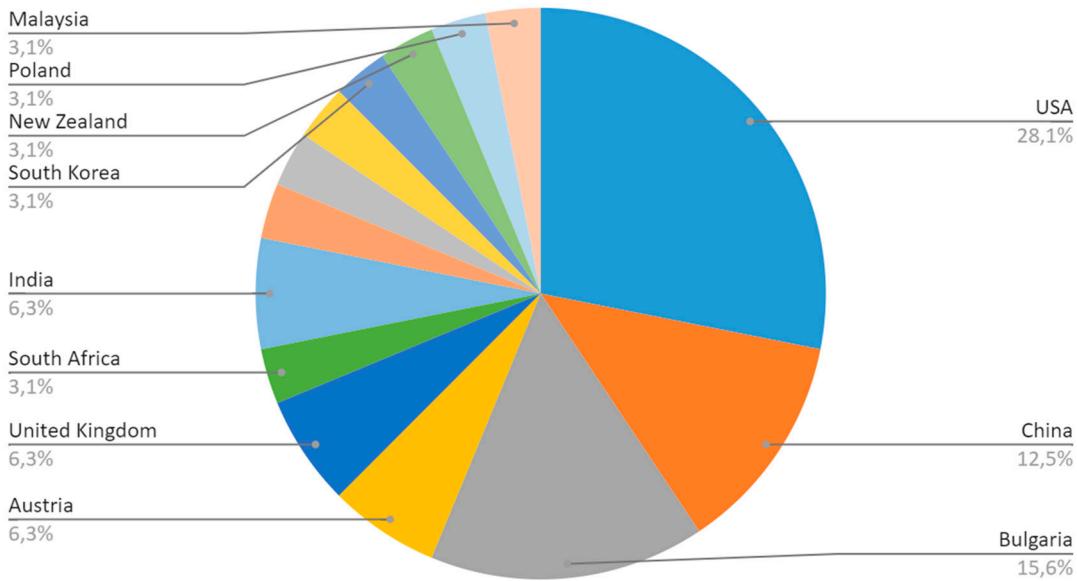


Figure 2. Studies by country 2009-2023.

## Publications 2009-2023 per year

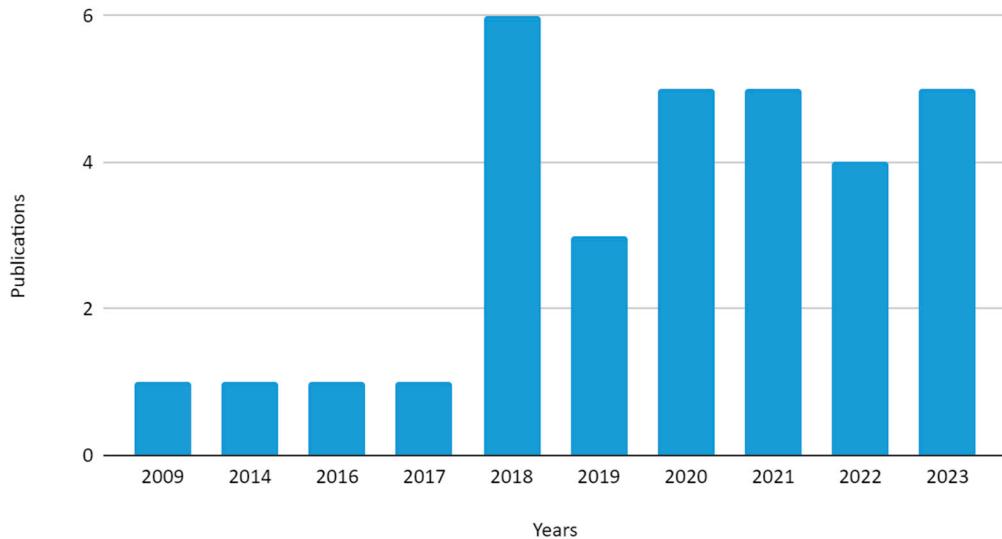


Figure 3. Publications by year.

Results were also analyzed following PRISMA guidelines and are presented in Table 1 indicating the following aspects: year of study, authors, study location, objective, method, sample, results.

Table 1. Publications that related greenness, university campus, wellness or mental health.

Authors	Region / Year	Study objective	Method	Sample	Results
Tian et al. [21]	Anhui and Shandong provinces, China, 2023	To investigate the correlations of greenness exposure with test anxiety among university	Cross-sectional study with perceived campus greenness and NDVI for objective greenness	2,609 university students	NDVI 1500-m correlated with lower test anxiety, physical activity may partially mediate this association. Increased campus greenness may

		students during COVID-19 lockdowns.		alleviate test anxiety among Chinese university students.	
Gulwadi et al. [4]	Turkey and the United States, 2019	To correlate objective and perceived greenness and restorative effects among students from 2 campuses in USA and 2 campuses in USA.	Cross-sectional study for perceived greenness and quality of life survey and use of NDVI for objective greenness	1,079 university students of business, design, and psychology	The space immediately next to buildings in which instruction takes place gain more significance when students spend longer hours in class, as that offers the closest access to greenspaces and enables a setting for social support.
Liu et al. [7]	University in Fuzhou, China, 2018	To develop a self-rated naturalness scale to measure perceived naturalness, and examine the association between self-rated naturalness and students' restoration and health	Questionnaire with indicators for assessing perceived naturalness based on Chinese socio-cultural background in 8 university campus areas.	2,550 university students of Agriculture and Forestry	Self-rated health and higher level of restoration showed a positive relation with the perception of high natural attributes and the perception of natural form, both for men and women, even controlling for physical activity and social cohesion.
Liprini & Coetzee [18]	University of Pretoria, South Africa, 2017	To determine where students spend their free time on campus, how they perceive their on-campus green spaces and the extent they found these spaces restorative.	Questionnaire for Perceived restorativeness Scale [PRS]. Statistical analyses to determine which of the green spaces contributed most significantly to overall PRS scores.	286 university students	All green areas made significant contributions, but the campus's botanical garden with large amount of variety was the greatest contributor to Perceived Restoration Scale, followed by area with presence of water.
Hipp et al. [8]	United States, 2016	To verify if green campus spaces provide restorative potential to university students and if students perceive it.	Students were surveyed with items on perceived greenness of campus, perceived restorativeness of campus, and the World Health Organization Quality-of-Life Scale	5,683 students of 3 universities	Results indicate that those with higher perceived campus greenness report greater quality of life, a pathway significantly and partially mediated by perceived campus restorativeness.
Bernat et al. [11]	Lublin, Poland, 2022	To determine whether and to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the importance of recreation areas and the perception of landscape among students affected by lockdown.	Survey conducted in two stages, using online survey. The first concerned with the perception of landscape and the second with the importance of recreational areas.	381 university students	Significance of recreation areas increased during the pandemic. The perception of landscape changed as well: the value of nature, scenic views, and therapeutic effect of the landscape began to be appreciated to a greater extent. Survey results indicate need to ensure diversity of green areas and improve their accessibility, and to consider quiet areas, green mobility and places of recreation.
Larson et al. [12]	United States, 2022	To assess how, and why, outdoor recreation and park use changed since COVID-19.	During the early stages of the pandemic, survey measured students' self-reported levels of emotional distress and assessed potential demographic and contextual correlations to distress, including county-level per capita park area and greenness, using generalized linear models. Objective greenness measured by NDVI.	1,280 students of 4 large public universities across the country	Reducing use of outdoor spaces due to lockdowns, concerns about viral transmission, and negative emotions. Those who maintained pre-pandemic park use desired to be in nature, for improving mental and physical health. Emotional distress among students was widespread. Higher levels of emotional distress were associated with reducing park use and residing in counties.

Ha & Kin [16]	United States, 2021	To verify if more biodiverse green-spaces have more restorative effects than conventional lawns in campus environments.	Four-group pre-posttest randomized experiment, and a 360-degree view video via an online platform survey.	Students were randomly assigned to 4	319 university	with a smaller area of parks per capita.
Oswald et al. [22]	Australia, 2021			experimental settings: [1]	Neither the level of biodiversity nor natural sound had a significant effect on restorative and mood states.	
Nazif-Munoz et al. [23]	El Paso, Texas, USA, 2020			low-biodiversity with no sound, [2] high-biodiversity with no sound, [3] low-biodiversity with sound, and [4] high-biodiversity with sound. Restorative and mood status were evaluated using the restorative state scale [RSS] and the Short Form of The Profile of Mood States [POMS-SF].	319 university	
Loder et al. [19]	Graz, Austria, 2020			319 university	students	

		relation to mental health.	green space; mental health was measured with the WHO-5 well-being index. Uni- and multivariate regression analyses used to analyze the data.	university and mental health. This adds more evidence to the existing literature that perceiving the environment as green is positively related to better mental health.
Loder et al. [24]	Graz, Austria, 2020	To verify the associations between objective or subjective neighborhood greenness and health.	Objective and perceived greenness assessed at home and at university. Health measures by questionnaire for mental health, IPAQ questionnaire for physical activity and sedentariness, and body mass index. Per location, quintile pairs of objective and perceived greenness were classified into underestimates, correct estimates, or overestimates.	ANOVA models only showed poorer mental health for students underestimating greenness at university compared to those with correct estimates. Agreement between greenness scores at home but not at university was obtained, and mental health was related to the perception of greenness at university.
Srugo et al. [15]	Ontario, Canada, 2019	To investigate associations between school-based measures of greenness and students' mental health in Canada.	Link participant responses from the 2016–2017 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey to school-based features of the built environment. Measures of greenness with NDVI. Measures of mental health included: serious psychological distress [Kessler 6-item Psychological Distress Scale], self-rated mental health, suicide ideation, and suicide attempt. Greenspace measured by NDVI and tree cover density. Symptoms of anxiety and depression measured with the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale and Patient Health Questionnaire.	Prevalence of serious psychological distress and low self-rated mental health was 16.7% and 20.3%, respectively. Suicide ideation reported by 13.5%, and 3.7% reported a suicide attempt. Quantity of greenness was similar between schools. In logistic regressions there was no association between objective school-based greenness and mental health, as assessed by multiple measures.
Dzhambov et al. [25]	Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2019	To examine relations among restorative experience, mindfulness, rumination, and psychological resilience, linking residential greenspace to anxiety and depression symptoms.	Mediators assessed by self-report: perceived greenspace, restorative quality of the neighborhood, dispositional mindfulness, rumination, and psychological resilience. Structural equation modelling techniques were used to test the theoretically indicated relations among variables.	Across different buffer sizes, higher greenspace was consistently associated with reduced scores on the anxiety and depression scales. This effect was partially mediated via several pathways. Specifically, higher NDVI 500-m was associated with higher perceived greenspace, and in turn, with higher restorative quality, and then with higher mindfulness, lower rumination, and greater resilience to stress, and consequently, with better mental health.
Dzhambov et al. [5]	Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2018	To examine how different pathways between green/blue	Residential greenspace measured by NDVI, tree cover density, 720 (18-35 years old)	Higher NDVI within a 300 m buffer around the residence was associated with better

		space and mental health can work together.	percentage of green areas, and distance to green space. Blue space measured by presence in neighborhood. Mental health measured with General Health Questionnaire. Mediators considered: perceived neighborhood green/blue space, restorative quality of the neighborhood, social cohesion, physical activity, noise and air pollution, and environmental annoyance. Structural equation modelling used to analyze data. Two models of short, low-cost interventions were evaluated for their potential to mitigate chronic stress while providing interactions with nature, RESET (Release Everyday Stress and Enjoy Trails): first a 1 min "Digital detox nature stop", second a 5 min. "Mindfulness in Nature trail". coding schema and method for evaluation.	medical students	mental health through higher perceived greenspace, leading to increased restorative quality, and subsequently to increased physical activity; through lower noise exposure, which in turn was associated with lower annoyance. Presence of blue space within a 300 m buffer did not have a straightforward association with mental health owing to competitive indirect paths.
Ibes et al. [9]	Williamsburg, USA, 2018	To investigate the psychological impact of two short green space interventions that integrate two proven approaches to stress reduction - mind-body skills and nature exposure.	Road traffic noise (Lden) level was calculated from the strategic noise map of the city. Objective greenspace tested: NDVI, tree cover density, and distance to the nearest green space. Mental health measured with the General Health Questionnaire. Moderation analysis and the Johnson-Neyman (J-N) procedure were used to identify values along the continuous moderators. Cross-sectional and longitudinal. Students followed from the beginning to the end of the school year.	558 voluntary participants (undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and visitors)	Statistical and qualitative analysis of the participants reveals that these simple, low-cost interventions were instantly popular and well received and had a positive psychological effect on 96% of participants who reported psychological impact, most commonly, relief from stress (82%).
Dzhambov et al. [26]	Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2018	To investigate whether residential greenspace modified the effect of road traffic noise on general mental health in students.	399 (15-25 years students from 2 high schools and 3 universities)	Results indicated that living in a neighborhood deprived of trees enhanced the negative effect of noise, whereas in neighborhoods with higher tree cover density noise had no effect. Living in a less green neighborhood may enhance the negative effect of road traffic noise on mental health. This observed effect modification may not only be due to disrupted propagation of sound waves, but also to higher recreational quality in greener environment.	
Dzhambov [27]	Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2018	Pilot study aimed to examine mechanisms/variables mediating associations between residential green/blue space and symptoms of anxiety/depression.	109 students (18-35 years old of the Medical University)	Higher NDVI correlated with better mental health only indirectly through higher physical activity and restorative quality. Longitudinal data showed improved mental health but no significant effect of mediator variables. Similarly, blue space correlated with better mental health in all models, but physical activity and restorative quality were	

		residential noise and air pollution, environmental annoyance, perceived restorative quality of neighborhood, social cohesion, physical activity, and sleep disturbance.	significant mediator variables only in the cross-sectional analysis.
Dzhambov et al. [28]	Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2018	<p>Objective greenspace defined by NDVI, Soil Adjusted Vegetation Index, tree cover density and distance to nearest greenspace. Self-reported measures of availability, access, quality, and usage of greenspace were used.</p> <p>Mental health measured with General Health Questionnaire. Potential mediators considered in single and parallel mediation models: restorative quality of the neighborhood, neighborhood social cohesion, commuting and leisure time, physical activity, road traffic noise annoyance, and perceived air pollution. Four models tested with serial mediation components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[1] restorative quality → social cohesion;</li> <li>[2] restorative quality → physical activity;</li> <li>[3] perceived traffic pollution → restorative quality;</li> <li>[4] noise annoyance → physical activity.</li></ul>	<p>There was no direct association between objectively measured greenspace and mental health. For the 500-m buffer, the tests of the single mediator models suggested that restorative quality mediated the relationship between NDVI and mental health. Tests of the serial mediation models showed that higher restorative quality was associated with more physical activity and more social cohesion, and in turn with better mental health.</p> <p>As for self-reported greenspace measures, single mediation through restorative quality was significant only for time in greenspace; however, serial mediation through restorative quality and social cohesion/physical activity was indicated for all self-reported measures except for greenspace quality.</p>
Asim et al. [29]	Himachal Pradesh, Himalayas, India, 2023	<p>Survey to identify activity hotspots on campus, and a neuropsychological study involving mobile EEG and Perceived Restorativeness Scale (PRS) at these hotspots to investigate the role of built environment aspects on restorative approach/neglect behavior and perception of built environment. The study relies on four prominent theoretical constructs in the area, namely Attention Restoration Theory (ART), Stress Reduction Theory (SRT).</p>	<p>Environmental aspects, such as vegetation, novelty/uncertainty, acoustic ambience, and expansive vistas, are positively associated with favorable approach behaviors and normalized average alpha brain waves, while other elements, such as presence of high density of buildings may be related to avoidance behaviors. Greenery and Sky had the most positive relationship with the Normalized Alpha, resence of buildings revealed negative relationship. Natural components as grass, sky, and filtered and diffused light boost people's perceptions of an environment's restorative characteristics.</p>

			The NatureDose™ app uses GPS and a phone's sensors to evaluate levels of nature surrounding the person with the NatureScore™ measure, based on more than 30 remotely sensed datasets, geo-located health records, and machine learning models. College students' nature exposure monitored for eight weeks, their mood states calculated weekly using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). Observational associations between average nature exposure and mood levels across the study period used mixed-effect linear regression models adjusting for gender and allergies.	97 university students (18-22 years old)	Positive association between nature exposure and positive mood. Findings supported by sensitivity analyses with ANOVA models on average NatureDose™ levels. Average nature exposure was 71 min per day. Study supports the utility of using NatureDose™ as an app-based tracking tool for objective nature exposure measurement and reinforces previous findings on the associations between nature exposure and positive mood states. Greening university campuses could support college students' mental health.
Bardhan et al. [30]	Public university, SE United States, 2023	To conduct one of the first longer-term investigations of daily nature exposure and mood with a mobile app as part of the NatureDose™ Student Study (NDSS).			
Lemyre et al. [31]	Oxford and Southampton, United Kingdom, 2023	To investigate use of neighborhood greenspace access and wellbeing.	During the tail end of the third 'lockdown', an online questionnaire was used to better understand mental wellbeing in relationship to use of outdoor green space. Analyses include descriptive results of indicators and hierarchical multiple linear regression models.	424 university students	Quality of greenspace had a greater importance on mental wellbeing than use and quantity of greenspace, even when controlling for sociodemographic factors. Also, neighborhood greenspace quality contributed to wellbeing above and beyond sociodemographic, physical activity and social support. This result held true even among students with prior mental health difficulties.
Ning et al. [32]	Changchun, Jilin Province, China, 2023	To explore the transient recovery effects of four types of campus environments, square space, dense forest, sparse forest, and waterfront.	Field experiment students, measuring systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, and heart rate as physical parameters to assess stress recovery. Respondents also reported scores about their personal feelings in questionnaires to evaluate their psychological states.	60 university students of Landscape Architecture	Physiological and psychological indicators responded to the brief natural exposure [5 min], and physiological and psychological health was restored. Only the recovery amounts of psychological indicators were significantly different in waterfront space, dense forest space, and sparse forest space. Brief exposure in the waterfront space was the most beneficial to students' psychological health recovery. Findings qualify research into young adult's experience of urban green spaces and their tangible connection to plants such as trees. Policy and practice implications include the requirement for a coherent approach to understanding the place-attachment aspects to
Boyd [33]	University of Sheffield, United Kingdom, 2022	To examine the participants' interactions with nature and experience of the university campus and designed interventions.	Mixed methods approach, with statistical analysis and focus group discussion. Use of a green prescription style activity and a specially designed mobile phone app to evaluate how participants experienced	55 students completed the experiment	

			the 30 days interventions.		
Stepansky et al. [34]	Private university, NE United States, 2022	To verify if engagement in the use of green spaces improved health and well-being.	Pilot study with lived experience of two students and investigation of perceptions of a university campus therapeutic sensory garden on the quality of life based on the utilization of the green space. Quantitative and qualitative measures assessed student use of therapeutic sensory garden and perceived quality of life related to social, mental, and physical well-being. Questionnaires to participants in 3 hostels in containment zone.	2 university students	nature in the university environment. There is a need for collaborative wellbeing interventions and urban green space development within the UK context.
Asim et al. [29]	Haridwar District, Himalayan, India, 2021	To understand the role of containment zone Built Environments in the prevalence of Anxiety and Depression.	Linear regression between Built Environment Variable Score with Center for Epidemiologic Studies/ depression and Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale. Pre and post-test to evaluate psychological effect of forest activities in a campus. The Profile of Mood State questionnaire, the Concise Measure of Subjective Well-Being, and the Stress Response Inventory were administered to assess psychological effects.	432 University students	Findings from quantitative and qualitative analysis of the lived experiences of two student are consistent with that of current evidence literature indicating a positive association between time spent in a green space/natural environment and perceptions of quality of life. Pilot study findings present structure and hypotheses related to time utilization, anticipated outcomes, and active ingredients for therapeutic sensory garden intervention with larger sampled groups of university students.
Kim et al. [35]	Chungbuk National University, Chungbuk, South Korea, 2021	To examine the psychological effects of campus forest activities in a forest, South Korea.	Randomized controlled trial compared 'apparently well' participants into intervention groups, sensory garden (SG), and urban plaza (UP), and a control group (CG). SG and UP participants had 'appointment outdoors' once weekly for 4 weeks. All tested for salivary cortisol, perceived wellbeing, productivity, perceived stress, nature relatedness pre- and post-intervention; data analyzed using	38 university students [mean age 22, with no diagnosis of severe stress or depression and no drug or alcohol abuse]	Results revealed that students living in rooms with access to quality window views overlooking greenery and sky in addition to presence of indoor plants and portrait/artworks, are at lower risk of depression and severity of anxiety.
Souter -Brow et al. [36]	Auckland, New Zealand, 2021	To explore the potential of salutogenic design as a stress-reducing health promotion tool for 'apparently well' people in a workplace setting.	164 (18-65 years old staff and students)	This study revealed that participants in the forest activities intervention group had significantly positive increases in their mood, stress response, and subjective well-being, comparing with those of control group participants who did not partake in any forest activities.	
					Significant intervention effects were observed for salivary cortisol, wellbeing and productivity. Although not significant, a surprising trend towards negative effects of the Urban Plaza on wellbeing, productivity, and perceived stress were observed when compared to the Sensory Garden group. This study suggests a sensory garden effectively reduces stress, enhances wellbeing and improves productivity of 'apparently well' people in the workplace.

			generalized linear models.		
Malekinezhad et al. [37]	Malaysia, 2020		To investigate how the perception of characteristics of natural space, directly and indirectly, affects restoration experience within the area of green outdoor landscape.	Test of associations through application of partial least squares with structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), inputting data from a sample of university students.	550 students (5 universities)
Reese et al. [38]	Pacific Northwest, United States, 2020		To explore the role that campus greenspaces might play in preventing stress and promoting student health on college campuses	Qualitative study using photovoice in crafting a vision for how natural spaces might be maintained and developed to promote health. 5 themes emerged: mental and physical health, community spaces, sustainable infrastructure design, preserving natural habitat and history, homelessness.	72 undergraduate students
Krasny & Delia [39]	The Cornell campus at Cornell in Natural area, USA, 2014		To understand how university students experience engagement in campus natural area stewardship and related policy discussions	Pretest - posttest semi structured student interview for a control group experimental design who performed 8 sessions of forest activities. Psychological evaluations used Profile of Mood states, Stress Response Inventory and Concise Measure of Subjective well-being questionnaires.	10 undergraduate students
Lau & Yang [40]	China, Hong Kong University, 2009		To study the potential role of the introduction of healing gardens to a compact campus in creating a health-supportive and sustainable campus environment.	Case study of introducing healing gardens and observation of design and use patterns	33 Staff, graduate, and post graduate students
					The effect of Perceived Sensory Dimensions (PSD) on perceived restorativeness leading to better explanation of restoration experience. Perceived landscape characteristics of PSD enhance restoration experience and is a mediator of the relationship between perceived campus greenness and students 'quality of life.
					Aspects of the student vision may be incorporated into future campus environmental planning efforts. Additional research is needed in determining whether community-based greenspace planning on college campuses can positively impact the extent to which students access natural spaces for the purposes of alleviating stress and promoting health.
					Authors found that three conditions explain student engagement in the adaptive co management process: the presence of a pre-existing student organization that had built bonding social capital and was committed to campus natural area stewardship, openness to multiple stakeholder viewpoints and commitment to action on the part of the university administration, and the presence of a crisis that spurred emotions and action. Student organizations can contribute to an adaptive co management process, consistent with university and campus sustainability.
					Therapeutic benefits of a healing garden are recognized by staff and students. Because of the small campus size, green spaces are reduced and do not encourage large groups of people, but provide nature like view from surrounding paths and windows, providing physiological benefits such as stress attenuation and attention restoration. Natural settings as courtyard, atrium and green roof gardens and green walls are suitable for small campus.

Total	27,955
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Source: Organized by the authors.

#### 4. Discussion

Research on the topic is recent, mostly in the northern hemisphere, and in higher income countries. Nine studies (28%) were undertaken in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC), where university degree expansion is taking place. No studies were undertaken in Latin America, showing that the focus on campus environment for the growing issue of mental health among university students is unexplored. The pressure on college students is as hard as or even harder than in higher income countries, due to economic hardships and need to work from an early age in most cases concomitantly with academic life. Another finding is that studies are often concentrated in a Research group. Among the 32 articles, 9 were from repeated authors.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of open space for university students and seemed to motivate studies on the topic in more countries and areas, as most manuscripts date from 2020 on.

Regarding Methods for identifying and calculating surrounding natural environment, most studies used objective information on campuses' greenness, based on satellite images with Normalized Difference Vegetation Index - NDVI (10 studies), vegetation index, tree cover density and land cover database. Some research employed objective and subjective measures such university students' perception on the presence and quality of greenspace in campus and a few around their residential area. Some used only perceptive values on greenness. One study used a NatureDose app with GPS and a phone 'sensor in the student cell phone [30] and one study was a pre-posttest randomized experiment with a 360-degree video platform via online survey [16]. The research by Reese et al. (2020) used photovoice technique with a photovoicekit to foster students to take images on class outings, later host a photo exhibit on campus and use their vision for discussing a variety of ways that underdeveloped greenspaces on campus might be utilized to promote student physical and mental health [38]. Three of the articles described results of interventions on campus such the creation of sensory garden [40], therapeutic sensory garden [34], short greenspace interventions [9,33] and forest activities [35].

Mental health was mostly measured by surveys or questionnaires (21 studies, 65%) with validated scores. Ning et al. (2023) used physiological indicators to measure restorative effects of exposure to natural campus areas (green and blue spaces): systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure and heart rate recovery amounts [32]. Asim et al. (2023) measured brainwaves with EEG to assess the benefits, and Souter-Brow et al. (2021) measured salivary cortisol of students [29,36].

Findings of all the studies pointed positive association between campus greenery and well-being of students indicating the restorative role of greenness and water bodies on campus and/or around students' residential area. Just one of the 32 studies, undertaken in a natural desert environment, found a protective role of brownness (35% decrease in the incidence of depression), which may be explained by scarce green areas and familiarity with the desert environment and color [23]. Most studies had cross-sectional design or were investigations on limited experiences. Evaluation of large-scale interventions to improve mental health, based on use and or improvements on green/blue spaces, with longitudinal methods, are still very limited to healing gardens and short periods of time.

Nevertheless, many students participated in these investigations. Adding students from all the samples came to a total of 27,955 individuals of both sexes and different academic backgrounds, in diverse areas around the world, from public and private universities or colleges. These high numbers turn the findings quite robust.

Some mediating effect variables that explain how a greenspace affects beneficial outcomes were observed in a few studies: reduced road traffic noise, heath island, perceived air pollution, and isolation; and increased physical activity and social cohesion.

We conclude that there is a large potential for use of university campuses in programs and sites for students' restoration and stress relief. Examples are therapeutic sensory gardens [34,36], forest activities [35], indoor plants and window views for plants and trees [29], green micro-breaks [9].

Walking and bicycling trails along the campus green areas, benches in silent and shady gardens, botanical gardens were also reported as missing to attract students experience for a restorative environment. Gulwadi (2019) concluded that the space immediately next to buildings in which instruction takes place gain more significance when students spend longer hours in class, as that offers the closest access to greenspaces and enables social support [4]. Cultural aspects and geographical locations are of great importance according to the biophilia theory. Students' perception of the wellness provided by greenness depend also on their experience, background, and taste. An important requirement is the sense of security of being outdoors and for this care and maintenance of the campus green spaces are crucial. The cost of these items can be high but are lower than those of expanding mental health services [41].

We highlight the relevance of student's participation and engagement in activities for promoting student wellness and mental health, but also on planning land and nature use [38], on promoting campus sustainability [40], and natural area stewardship. Student's perspective is particularly important in the face of this serious mental health crisis [39], as it may foster student trust, engagement, and learning that can be leveraged beyond a particular crisis to support longer term sustainability goals.

University campuses might provide a salutogenic influence, as natural environments provide restoration to university students and are also a contributing factor to student retention because those who suffer mental health disorders are more likely to drop out, underperform academically and are less likely to secure higher level employment [33].

Greenness in university campus is even more important in LMIC countries, as a large proportion of the urban young adults live in neighborhoods crowded with small houses where vegetation is almost non-existent. We urge Latin American universities to turn eyes to this topic of investigation and practice.

We also call for the need of an interdisciplinary approach to the mental health issue among university students, with the integration of mental health services, landscape architecture, geography, campus administration, cultural activities, and physical activity practices.

## 5. Conclusions

Findings of all the studies indicated positive association between campus greenery and well-being of students. However, university campuses' natural environments are largely underutilized in programs and sites for students' restoration and stress relief. As they usually have large green areas between buildings some low-cost interventions and open-air programs could contribute to diminish prevalence and severity of mental health disorders, such as depression, and anxiety among university students together with other initiatives. Investigations among university students are still limited but showed a large potential also for student engagement and building of social capital.

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