

Emotions and coping mechanisms experienced at the coast: A qualitative study

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INTRODUCTION

- Multiple studies have demonstrated that residential proximity to the coast is associated with a better health and well-being.
- Research on the suggested pathways linking coastal exposure to well-being has been mainly focused on physical, social, and cognitive dimensions but less so on the emotional dimension.
- Young adults are faced with multiple stressors and understanding the role of the emotional experience generated by the coast can bring insight into possible solutions in the prevention of psychological distress and support of well-being.

AIMS

- In-depth analysis of the experience of coast-induced emotions and coping mechanisms of young coastal residents
- Exploration of how these emotions and coping mechanisms relate to the coast's therapeutic potential

METHODS

- Purposive sample of eight participants, aged 21-25 years old, living near the Belgian coast
- Semi-structured interviews via Skype
- Interview guideline with 13 questions, e.g. "What specific emotions do you feel when you are by the sea?", "What effect does experiencing these emotions have on you?"
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
- Repeat steps 1-3 for each participant

"The sea is also very fascinating because when you stand by the sea and you listen to the noise that the sea makes, you know that it has enormous power."



RESULTS

- Five superordinate themes were identified throughout the interviews

Theme	Subtheme	Quote
Awe	Positive awe	<i>"The greatness of the beach, of nature [...] we realize that we are actually nothing compared to the sea."</i>
	Negative awe	
Nostalgia	Socially related or not	<i>"I remember that moment sometimes when I come to the beach in the summer, that reminds you so much of friendship."</i>
	Characteristics and effect	
Restoration	Stress reduction	<i>"It calms me down, gives me peace of mind."</i>
	Cognitive focus	
Coping mechanisms	Contemplation and meaning-making	<i>"The big questions of life then begin to play out."</i>
	Letting go of emotions	
	Exteriorizing emotions	<i>"Sometimes I can really let my anger or my grief run out, so that it can really get out."</i>
	Seeking peak flow	
Coast as a safe haven	Respite from daily life	<i>"I think that with many other things in our lives it is always very busy [...] and by the sea I find a place where you can once in a while be somewhat stimulus-free."</i>
	Feeling of freedom and safety	
	Opportunity to be alone	

CONCLUSION

- Our study highlights experiences of complex emotions, namely in terms of awe, nostalgia, and psychological restoration.
- These emotions, accompanied by adaptive coping mechanisms, are facilitated by the coast's multisensory and symbolic qualities.
- These emotions and coping mechanisms play an impactful role on the young adults' experience with living near the coast.
- The emotions and coping mechanisms should be considered as potential contributors to the coast's therapeutic potential.