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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communities actively seek nature for well-being despite constraints: (Re)representation of nature experiences through composite narratives

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Abstract

1. While the physical and mental health benefits of greenspace exposure are well documented, ethnic minority communities in the United Kingdom continue to engage with these environments at disproportionately lower rates. This persistent disparity points to an oversight in existing literature, specifically regarding how these communities navigate everyday encounters with nature.
2. This qualitative study employs interviews and diary methods to explore the restorative processes, motivations and preferences of ethnic minority residents in Bristol, United Kingdom. By communicating these experiences through the novel approach of composite narratives, the research endeavours to situate lived realities within intersectional contexts, ensuring the findings remain nuanced and resistant to essentialist assumptions.
3. Our findings reveal that engagement with nature is a purposeful element of daily life, with psychological restoration serving as a conscious and instrumental strategy for well-being. Distinct preferences revealed a range of landscape typologies, including blue spaces, urban woodlands and family-oriented parks, while a range of constraints to engagement and visitation were also present.
4. Using composite narratives further illuminates the role of social relationships in shaping greenspace experiences, highlighting a tension between positive experiences and overlapping constraints. While participants negotiate challenges that are both universal and culturally specific, these obstacles do not simply override restorative encounters; instead, they form a constellation that evolves across multiple scales.
5. This study demonstrates that, despite these constraints, urban greenspaces remain vital resources for these communities. The findings underscore the necessity

of enhancing everyday access for those who need it most, living in densely populated or low-income urban areas. By developing safe, welcoming environments and including communities in environmental planning, we can instil more equitable approaches to provision that enhance well-being for all urban residents.

KEYWORDS
environmental justice, ethnicity, greenspace, nature, nature connection, psychological restoration, urban, woodland

1 | INTRODUCTION

Research underscores the vital role of urban greenspaces and the countryside in enhancing physical, mental and social health (Browning et al., 2022; Houlden et al., 2018). Despite these benefits, access to greenspaces in the United Kingdom remains markedly uneven, particularly affecting ethnic minority communities, who generally experience lower levels of access and engagement. The People and Nature Survey (IFF Research, 2023) reveals that many ethnic minority groups report significantly lower participation in greenspace visits. Notably, Black or Black British adults exhibit particularly low engagement levels, with many indicating they do not visit greenspaces regularly. In contrast, while some groups perceive visitation as routine, others, such as those from Asian or Asian British heritage, are more likely to view these visits as more 'exceptional' events.

UK ethnic minority groups' nature engagement is influenced by various demographic and geographic factors that contribute to inequalities in access. Urban residents often encounter practical constraints to accessing the countryside or high-quality urban greenspaces. Intersecting factors such as gender also play an additional role with women, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, facing challenges shaped by safety concerns (Ward et al., 2023). Skin colour and religious affiliation also increases the likelihood of being exposed to unfriendly attitudes and discrimination which can reduce visitation and undermine the potential benefits (Hamza et al., 2024). Yet, these obstacles do not define the entirety of the 'minoritised' experience—to move beyond a discourse of deficit, we must also reveal the existing relationships and nature connectivity between UK ethnic minority communities and the natural world. By doing so, a more authentic understanding of the diverse ways in which different communities engage with and benefit from these spaces can be understood to inform more inclusive and nuanced policies that promote access and engagement (Askins, 2006; Palmer, Riley, Clement, et al., 2025).

While a shift towards inclusive access is underpinned by a growing body of evidence, the psychological and cultural values of nature have largely been explored through parallel, yet historically disconnected, academic lenses. Environmental psychology, for instance, offers valuable insights into how individuals derive mental health benefits from natural environments through reducing stress (Ulrich et al., 1991) and replenishing cognitive resources (Kaplan, 1995). As Weber and Trojan (2018) observe, traditional restoration theories have often been limited by a conceptual fixation on natural environments, which has inhibited an unbiased understanding of restorative potential within the diverse social and built contexts. The field continues to struggle with a lack of empirical attention towards how different social groups perceive and utilise restorative spaces, creating a notable void in the current body of evidence.

This gap is exacerbated by the fact that restorative research has primarily focused on White populations in Global North contexts (Keniger et al., 2013), leaving a cleavage in our understanding of the well-being processes across diverse cultural groups. As Gallegos-Riofrío et al. (2022, p. 8) observed, the current landscape represents a missed opportunity where researchers have largely failed to address the intersections of ethnicity, race and cultural background. While cultural ecosystem services literature provides a useful counterpoint by emphasising aesthetic, spiritual and communal values (Chan et al., 2012), moving beyond these disciplinary boundaries remains a necessity. Bridging this knowledge gap requires a synthesis of psychology, geography, sociology and leisure studies to work towards more equitable and inclusive outcomes (Edwards et al., 2022; Palmer et al., 2023).

As ethnic minority populations in the United Kingdom are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas, they often face a persistent inequity in the distribution of high-quality local spaces (CABE, 2010). For these communities, who often face systemic health inequalities, local greenspaces are not just amenities but vital infrastructure for well-being (Geary et al., 2023; McEachan et al., 2018). Within these urban contexts, nature serves a dual purpose by offering both physiological restoration and a site of cultural expression and inter-cultural contact (Peters et al., 2010). Provision alone, however, does not ensure social harmony—as Mullenbach et al. (2022) warn, the assumption that greenspaces act as natural bridges across social divides, without addressing underlying structural inequalities, can result in reinforcing existing prejudices rather than simply dismantling them.

A well-worn path in leisure studies in the United States and United Kingdom has consistently highlighted how ethnicity, social

justice and geography intersect to shape nature engagement (Agyeman, 1990; Neal et al., 2015). Roberts (2015) notes that while 'people of colour' deeply value nature for stress relief and spirituality, institutional cultures and limited representation often render parks unwelcoming. Importantly, this under-representation stems not from a lack of interest, but from subtle systemic and cultural barriers. UK-based studies confirm these nuances: while Pakistani, Somali and White British communities all derive significant well-being from greenspaces, their usage patterns are dictated by specific cultural needs and safety concerns (Roe et al., 2016). Ultimately, although diverse groups seek comparable restorative benefits, their ability to realise them is mediated by preferences for certain spatial characteristics coupled with the pervasive constraints they tend to face (Edwards et al., 2022; Ward et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2018).

Adding to these issues are concerns regarding the marginalisation of voices, as individuals from ethnic minority groups continue to be excluded from discussions and decision-making processes in community greenspace projects and environmental planning (Haqqani, 2025). The persistence of these structured inequalities highlights the need for more inclusive practices that ensure diverse perspectives are represented—a paradigm shift that entails avoiding oversimplified approaches and reconsidering how representation functions in research and practice (Rishbeth, 2004). In doing so, scholars have warned that, by simply reporting on disadvantages, researchers inadvertently reinforce and reproduce inequalities through deficit-based framing (Brehm & Pellow, 2022; Palmer, Riley, Clement, et al., 2025; Polk & Diver, 2020). Collier (2022) stresses the need for acknowledging both the constraints to participation and the resilience within these communities, ensuring fair reporting on positive experiences and community agency. This approach ensures that the nuanced challenges faced by these groups are not simply reduced to a generic category of ethnicity.

In seeking to contribute to this discussion, we explore the lived experiences of individuals from various ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom. This study is drawn from a broader project investigating the motivations, perceptions, preferences and practices of ethnic minority participants, with a specific focus on how well-being practices and constraints are embedded within their daily routines. To achieve this, we draw from thematic analysis of 53 participants' transcripts to develop three composite narratives that present our findings. This approach leverages conceptual frameworks from environmental psychology and sociology to situate the data within everyday life, while simultaneously examining the value of composite narratives for communicating intersectional nature experiences. By acknowledging how intertwined social categories such as race, gender and class create distinct modes of engagement (Crenshaw, 1991), the paper advances these narratives not only as a methodological tool but also as a representational strategy. Ultimately, this allows us to convey complex realities in a manner that resists reductionism while preserving authentic participant voices.

2 | METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Our study drew upon interviews and diary methods with 53 individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Table 1). The study was set in Bristol, United Kingdom, which is an urban centre characterised by complex socio-spatial dynamics and variations in greenspace access. With 1652 parks and greenspaces and being surrounded by national landscapes, it has been described as one of the greenest cities in the United Kingdom. The city also features several densely populated areas which contrast with more affluent neighbourhoods that offer higher quality urban parks and more developed green infrastructure (Matheney et al., 2021). Bristol's identity is defined by its substantial Somali, Caribbean and South Asian populations, whose presence is most felt in the central and north-eastern parts of the city. Although festivals like St Pauls Carnival bring the streets to life with Caribbean culture, they also sit atop a layered historical foundation where Bristol's past prosperity was fuelled by the transatlantic slave trade—a legacy still visible part of the city's architecture and nomenclature (Casbeard, 2010).

2.1 | Recruitment

We engaged participants from diverse UK ethnic minority backgrounds[1] to enable an exploration of varied experiences and everyday interactions with greenspace. We employ the term 'UK ethnic minority' to first acknowledge that people from ethnic minorities are a global majority, and second, to enable explorations of diverse but shared experiences, from a large and heterogeneous group, who collectively show consistently lower access to greenspace than the UK average (Rishbeth et al., 2022). Multiple recruitment methods were employed, including the use of social media, working with community groups, door knocking and snowballing (cf. Raifman et al., 2022). We adopted an inclusive approach, open to all UK ethnic minority groups, to engage with the heterogeneity within Bristol and to explore unique and shared experiences of everyday well-being. We used a brief survey capturing demographic information, informed consent and self-reported greenspace visitation frequency, adapted from the Natural England's (2025b) *People and Nature Survey*. The research was conducted with ethical approval from the University of Liverpool's Faculty of Science and Engineering Research Ethics Committee (Reference: 11121).

We partnered with community centres to advertise through social media, alongside direct messaging to individuals embedded within local communities. We spent time in community centres, distributing

[1]Our study examines experiences of the UK's 'non-White' population (Opara et al., 2023), including African, Arab, Asian, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Mixed and Pakistani communities (BITC, 2015). While we use the term 'ethnic minority', we acknowledge these groups constitute the global majority and recognise this terminology's limitations in capturing visible/less-visible minorities and generational differences.

TABLE 1 Participant biographies.

ID	Demographics	Nature visit frequency	Recruitment	Biography
AF	Male, 30s, Mixed White & Caribbean heritage	More than twice a week	Facebook group	Nature is vital for his mental health. Experiences shaped by both White and Caribbean backgrounds and by living in both rural and urban areas
BN	Female, 40s, South Asian	Every day	Facebook group	A parent and health inequalities activist who has a young daughter. Uses nature daily to break up screen time and relieve stress
BP	Female, 50s, Brown British	Once/twice a month	Facebook group	Has a fragmented relationship with nature, limited by health and mobility concerns. Feels tension in public spaces, especially around White people
AV	Female, 20s, British Pakistani	More than twice a week	Snowball	Became interested in nature as an adult through social ties. Notes less interest among relatives and differences in nature engagement between UK and Pakistan
BC	Male, under 20, Caribbean, Jamaican-born	Twice a week	Snowball	Prefers local woods over urban parks. Has experienced unfriendliness but remains undeterred and would visit the countryside if not for transport limitations
BK	Male, 30s, Mixed White & Indian heritage	More than twice a week	Snowball	Grew up between Cornwall and India. Finds solace and artistic inspiration in nature, accessing it throughout his week without constraint
AO	Female, under 20, South Asian	Every day	Snowball	Access to nature often linked to college travel. Her family values nature but limited by central location and low-quality greenspaces
AG	Female, 20s, Asian Pakistani, Muslim	Twice a week	Snowball	Wants to access nature with her children but feels her headscarf signals religiosity and attracts negative attention
AQ	Female, 40s, Somali	More than twice a week	Community centre	A recent migrant, with a large family who prefers large parks further afield over local ones which better accommodate social gatherings
AC	Female, 30s, African	Once a week	Snowball	Grew up rurally and always felt interested in nature, despite it not being a family interest. Has become engaged with access initiatives and visits urban parks and National Trust properties
BL	Male, 40s, South African	More than twice a week	Snowball	Active in community arts and nature events. Critiques nature organisations for being exclusive and described the colonial history of the countryside
AJ	Male, 50s, Black British	Less often	Snowball	Wants to provide nature contact for his children but travel and entry fees are a constraint
BO	Female, 30s, Asian Pakistani, Muslim	Less often	Snowball	Nature engagement for her and her children have been shaped by discrimination in urban areas, leading to avoidance and adaptation
BQ	Female, 40s, British Pakistani, Muslim	Once/twice a month	Snowball	Unconcerned by potential unwelcoming attitudes in nature spaces. She puts this down to her self-determined nature
AM	Female, 30s, Arab, Muslim	Twice a week	Snowball	Visits urban parks with children but has had unpleasant encounters with White users
BM	Male, 40s, Somali, Muslim	Twice a week	Door knocking	Likes urban greenspaces, especially in contrast to those in Somalia but avoids busy times because his child, who has a disability, fears dogs
BS	Female, 70s, Jamaican	Twice a week	Snowball	Walks locally for physical health as part of her routine. She would love to spend time on a farm if possible
BF	Female, 30s, Black Caribbean	Every day	Snowball	Uses varied engagement to reduce stress, including walking groups and night walks, although safety fears limit night-time walking
BI	Female, 40s, Somali	Every day	Community centre	A parent who lives centrally and identifies hierarchies in park quality with respect to over-crowding and anti-social behaviour

informational flyers, and conducted door-to-door, in-place recruitment over 2 days in Bristol's Ashley and Lawrence Hill wards. These areas were selected for their high proportion of ethnic minority residents and their documented limited access to quality greenspace (as identified through Natural England's Green Infrastructure (GI) Mapping tool; Natural England, 2021). Door knocking proved particularly effective in reaching individuals who use greenspaces less frequently, thereby mitigating the self-selection bias often inherent in such studies (Akmatov et al., 2017). To acknowledge their time and contribution, all participants were offered a £20 compensation,

with the choice of receiving it via bank transfer, voucher or a donation to charity.

2.2 | Participant characteristics

Our participant pool represented various ethnic and cultural identities from diverse geographic settings, including dense urban and rural environments. These individuals spanned first- to second-generation immigrant backgrounds and were predominantly English speaking, though for several groups, including Somali participants, English was a second language. While the reported socio-economic status placed all participants on the basic tax rate, this metric often oversimplifies the complex intersections of class and culture (Manstead, 2018).

Table 1 presents participant information for those whose quotes are used in the following composite narratives. We requested self-ascribed ethnicity to avoid prescriptive classifications (Aspinall, 2021; Opara et al., 2023) but otherwise limited formal demographic requests to reduce barriers to recruitment among minority groups. Other biographical details, such as profession or religion, were not gathered systematically but emerged organically as participants introduced aspects of their identity, they considered relevant. This approach acknowledges that different facets of identity become more or less salient depending on an individual's unique social positioning and their specific interactions with greenspace.

2.3 | Interviews and diaries

The study comprised 53 participants (29 women, 24 men; aged 18–74 years) from diverse ethnic backgrounds including African, Asian, Arab, Caribbean and mixed heritage communities (Figure 1). Data collection methods were adapted to participant preferences, incorporating interviews face to face ($n = 28$), via Zoom ($n = 13$) or telephone ($n = 12$). While most interviews were conducted individually, some participants opted for small group discussions. Interviews were usually around 30–60 min but some street conversations last around 10 min.

Conversations began by exploring participants' regular routines, including specific locations and their motivations for visiting. To ensure a consistent understanding and address the known subjectivity in greenspace interpretations (Taylor & Hochuli, 2017), participants were introduced to Natural England's (2017) definition of greenspace as 'all green open spaces in and around towns and cities, as well as the countryside and coastline'. Additionally, participants were invited to document their positive and negative experiences using a diary format of their choice, such as pictures, videos or written entries. This strategy was intended to increase inclusivity, generate situated data and elicit deeper memories (Harper, 2002; Plage, 2022). However, only four participants chose this method, while those who opted out cited a preference for the predictability of an interview or a desire for a smaller time commitment.

2.4 | Initial thematic analysis

The basis for the composite analysis is drawn from an initial analysis of the transcripts using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step reflexive thematic analysis: (i) familiarisation; (ii) open coding; (iii) generating initial themes; (iv) developing and reviewing themes; (v) refining, defining and naming themes; (vi) writing for analysis. Using an inductive approach, this initial analysis derived several broad umbrella themes which formed the basis of the publication strategy. These findings were discussed among the research team and closely reviewed by the second author. Dual coding was not employed as it contradicts the reflexive thematic analysis approach, which rejects positivist reliability measures in favour of interpretative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The subsequent use of composite analysis communicates key findings on motivation and well-being, alongside important sub-findings that contextualise participants' experiences (See Figure 1 for an illustration of how the initial thematic analysis connected with constructing the composite narratives).

2.5 | Constructing composite narratives

We opted to present our thematic analysis through composite narratives to encapsulate the complex experiences of our participants. This approach was chosen in response to the call to avoid deficit framings (Thompson et al., 2025), to highlight positive experiences and to improve communicability of these issues

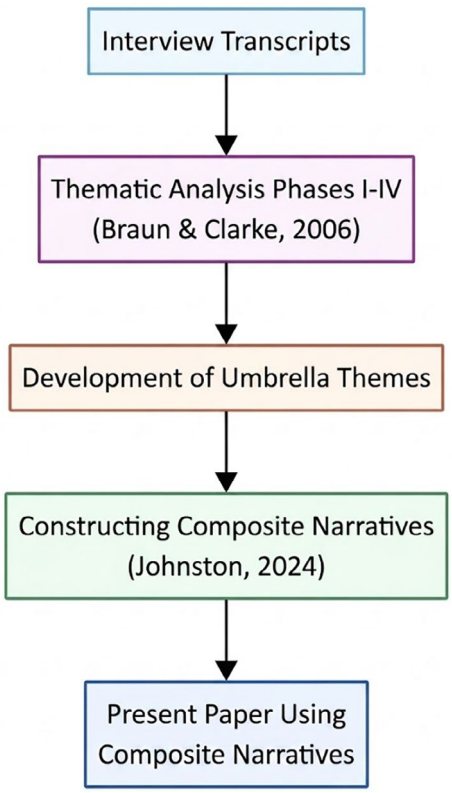

FIGURE 1 Visualisation of the analytical procedure.

beyond academic audiences (Willis, 2019). It is an emerging technique which has been used to convey nuanced insights related to well-being and inclusivity, particularly in environmental contexts (Creese et al., 2021; Fernandez et al., 2021; Wiens et al., 2021). Our participants responded enthusiastically to this approach when discussing publications, appreciating how composite narratives offer both a creative alternative to less accessible communication modes and capture the shared elements of their experiences. The narratives, often derived from thematic analysis, amalgamate multiple perspectives into cohesive narratives that preserve anonymity while holistically capturing the richness of individual experiences within a cognisable snapshot (Wertz et al., 2011; Willis, 2019). As Thompson et al. (2025, p. 2) note, this approach helps 'have the potential to emotionally resonate with audiences, which can create empathy towards the participant group and foreground voices from marginal groups' through storytelling that can engage diverse audiences including practitioners, policymakers and the public.

We adapted Johnston's (2024) six-step approach to constructing composite narratives, beginning with core experiences from selected participants that exemplified key themes identified in our initial analysis. These skeletal narratives were then enriched through the careful integration of additional participants' experiences, weaving them into coherent, accessible accounts. This method allowed us to build compelling narratives that preserved participants' original voices. For instance, in constructing the third composite narrative, we brought together multiple participants' experiences of being a parent and similar daily routines. This approach enabled us to express the nuanced interplay of these factors in shaping greenspace use, while protecting individual identities. Below, we detail how we applied each of Johnston's six steps to our specific analysis.

2.5.1 | Step 1: 'Develop a narrative thread (a storyline) for the first half of the narrative'

We identified the richest data segments that were illustrative of key themes and provided detailed accounts, usually originating from one participant's transcript that clearly represented these theme(s). We revisited the original transcripts to find quotes that would help weave together a coherent narrative to illustrate our findings. These initial narrative threads provided the basis to contextualise and deepen the composite narratives.

2.5.2 | Step 2: 'Build the first half of the narrative using quotes from other participants'

We wove in quotes from other interview participants who spoke to similar themes, adopting an inductive approach focusing on shared experiences rather than using predefined categories such as ethnicity, age or gender (Goldman, 2002). However, experiences can converge with specific categories, as is seen in the third composite narrative, which clusters around shared experiences of parents.

2.5.3 | Step 3: 'Develop a narrative thread for the second half of the narrative'

We integrated supporting findings and contextual details, emphasising participants' everyday experiences—adapting Johnston's (2024) framework. We combined steps 3 and 4 to accommodate varying depths of participant data. We acknowledge that this approach privileges participants who articulate their experiences with greater narrative clarity, potentially underrepresenting those whose accounts follow a more recursive pattern or who communicate in English as an additional language.

2.5.4 | Step 4: 'Build the second half of the narrative using quotes from other participants'

The narrative was then enriched with supporting quotes from other interview participants, carefully selected to maintain authenticity while highlighting the complexities of situated accounts.

2.5.5 | Step 5: 'Edit and structure the narrative'

We combined narratives together, ensuring each composite narrative had a clear arc and effectively conveyed key research findings, illustrated in Table 1. Instead of adding our own introduction and conclusion, as suggested by Johnston (2024), we used verbatim quotes from the participants to introduce and conclude the narratives.

2.5.6 | Step 6: 'Assigning a meaningful title'

For each composite narrative, we selected titles which captured their essence, derived from original quotes. We also use gender-neutral synonyms when referring to participants due to each character comprising male and female participants.

2.6 | Trustworthiness and rigour

Johnston (2024) suggests that composite narratives should be informed by member checking to ensure the narratives communicate the expressions of the participants. However, member checking of composite narratives presents significant practical challenges, particularly when working with multiple participants whose experiences have been merged into collective representations (McElhinney & Kennedy, 2022). We held feedback sessions with participants to allow for participants to challenge and discuss the findings, which included illustrative quotes and our intent to convey the nuances and

frictions within the data. The participants who attended were positive towards the use of composite narratives as an approach which dovetailed with arguments from some participants about 'changing the shit narrative' (AB) around 'Black people' and their (dis)engagement with nature.

To ensure rigour, an audit trail of primary data was maintained (Johnston, 2024). This transparency is operationalised in the supplementary materials, where the composite narratives are presented with their corresponding verbatim excerpts. Within the presentation of our narratives in this paper, raw excerpts are presented in *italics*, while authorial contributions remain in standard font.

3 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our thematic analysis reveals positive and inspiring experiences of health and well-being that add a complementary strand to the literature on ethnicity and greenspace access (see Table 2). By situating nature engagement within daily routines, these results provide important counternarratives to the deficit-based perspectives often found in existing research. These accounts highlight how psychological processes, social interaction and preferences for natural environments demonstrate the universal benefits of the outdoors. While we also identified various constraints, ranging from universal barriers to those tied to ethnicity and cultural factors, these challenges do not simply override positive encounters. Instead, they form a complex constellation of experiential accounts. Below, we highlight the key empirical themes from our data, encompassing a mix of physical and social benefits, landscape preferences, cultural influences and constraints to access. We then synthesise these themes through composite narratives, distilling our findings into an accessible format that balances negative and positive experiences to provide a holistic view of participants' lived realities. These insights are communicated through the following three composite narratives:

1. 'Better than a mental or spiritual prescription'.
2. 'Natural spaces with friends are my go-to'.
3. 'Free and accessible urban greenspaces!'.

3.1 | Better than a mental or spiritual prescription

The narrative provided in Box 1 captures the experiences of multiple participants by focusing on mental health, social interaction and the restorative benefits of natural spaces. While constructed primarily around the central account of an emergency service worker (AF), the narrative integrates insights from various participants to enrich the story. This synthesis highlights a pattern captured in our coding as *instrumental restoration*, a term used here to describe how individuals deliberately engage with natural environments as a strategic resource for mental health and well-being. The account further integrates complementary themes such as intergenerational differences and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on preferences for specific environments, including blue spaces.

As is communicated above, our data revealed several key findings around access and practices in greenspace, particularly centred on experiences of psychological restoration. The reference to 'whenever I can' (AF) and others such as 'like, I need to go outside to process things' (AO) demonstrates that greenspaces provide essential bulwarks to daily stressors. The frequent mentions of processes of renewal and stress reduction from several participants show that these greenspaces serve as deliberate punctuations in daily routines for people from all backgrounds. Processes construed through concepts such as 'being away' (distance from daily stressors) (Kaplan, 1995) are relevant here as we observe qualitative

TABLE 2 Overview of themes and subthemes.

Theme	Subthemes
Well-being and contact with nature	• The restorative effects of natural spaces on mental and physical well-being including deliberate and planned greenspace visitation • The role of greenspaces in nurturing social connections and shared experiences • Changes in the use and perception of greenspaces due to COVID-19
Preferences in nature engagement	• The role of natural environments, such as water bodies and woodlands in offering immersive and sensory experiences • Accessible and inclusive environments for families, particularly in contrast to the costs of premium sites • The primacy of accessible nearby greenspace for immediate psychological benefits • Generational differences in usage and preferences across different age groups
Constraints to nature engagement	• Personal constraints comprising time limitations, family responsibilities and competing priorities that affect ability to access greenspaces • Structural constraints encompassing sociodemographic and spatial inequalities, including marginalisation from premium sites and designated areas • Infrastructural limitations involving inadequate transport links and the uneven distribution of quality green spaces across neighbourhoods • Experiential constraints manifesting through unwelcoming attitudes, safety concerns and issues with other users including unleashed dogs • Environmental factors such as seasonality and variable climate that affect the enjoyment of outdoor spaces

BOX 1 Better than a mental or spiritual prescription

I work for the emergency services and natural spaces are something that I have to access just simply for mental health because work's so crazy. I'll spend a lot of my time in outdoor spaces whenever I can but that's usually depending on time. Take an average week, during four on, four off shifts, 12 h a day I'll be in *any number of areas, we're constantly around natural spaces, and in between jobs we'll have a quick 10–20 min in* that natural space.

I *realised there was never a point in my day where I wasn't either kind of engaging with something* or *talking to someone*. So, to just take *10 min where there's just nothing* or *just finding a little bit of time to slow that kind of wiring down of thought processes and to maybe help process stuff that's been going on in your head* has a massive benefit. *I absolutely need it to reduce stress levels—just to go outside and ground yourself and find some thinking time*—it's *better than a mental or spiritual prescription!*

Outside of work, I spend quite a lot of time walking around this area, where there's loads of natural greenspaces. I can see the edge of Somerset from my window here, so we go to Chew Magna, go to lots of things like that, just easily accessible places. I particularly *love* being near *any sort of water, whether it's sea or it's a river or a stream. That's why I got the kayak. It was just a way to be on the water, a desire to be in nature* away from *the built-up area*.

Sometimes you just forget how beneficial it is. If, *I'm going through a kind of 'blur'*, that's when *I realise*, I just need to *go back to my natural spaces, even if it's just* for *minutes. I am outdoors* more than I ever used to be, especially since COVID. I think the lockdown *helped people realise It's good to get out even if it's just to get out of the house and see how it affects you!*

I don't think my parents *realised that going outside to these kinds of places could impact their well-being until they actually did it*. Initially *they were like 'this is so boring, why are we just walking?'*. I remember *taking them to Malham Cove* and by *the end of the trail* they were noticeably more relaxed, *which was just something that I noticed in them*, but *they hadn't consciously put together that they were less stressed. For them, I guess it's* more about *being around things growing but they do enjoy walks. And for me, as well, I know consciously like if I don't get outside during the week, then I'm going absolutely stir crazy* and *anxious. That's why I've specifically tried to give myself that time … so, it's really important to have those spaces*.

Contributing participants: AF, BN, AV, BC, BK, AO, BP, BL.

Text in italics pertains to verbatim quotes while plain text indicates author contributions.

descriptions of these restorative experiences in nearby spaces. In their analysis of social media content about urban greenspaces in Northeast England, Wilkie et al. (2020) found that nearby environments and everyday settings could facilitate this psychological detachment, demonstrating how local nature functions as a deliberate reprieve from the pressures of daily life. Their research demonstrates that, even though these spaces may be integrated into users' daily lives, they still provide meaningful psychological distance from routine responsibilities, allowing for mental restoration and renewal.

In exploring this facet, which was the strongest motivator for visitation in our data, we use the term 'instrumental restoration' to capture this deliberate embedding of nature within personal well-being strategies—a practice that is more than just recreation but a vital coping mechanism and an inherent affinity for nature and renewal (Kaplan, 1995; Ulrich et al., 1991; Wilson, 1984). This deliberate engagement with nature, particularly in the transitions between work and home, relates to how individuals seek to establish a sense of security and shield themselves from daily anxieties (see also Giddens, 1984). Such strategies are highly relevant to urban planning, as Berto (2014) argues that thoughtfully designed landscapes can actively reduce daily stress while providing essential opportunities for physical, cognitive and emotional restoration.

While ethnicity and culture can shape environmental relationships in various ways (Neal et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2023; Palmer, Riley, Jones, et al., 2025), our research challenges essentialist assumptions about a predisposed disinterest in nature. Instead, the narratives reveal an interplay of factors, evident for example, through intergenerational dynamics. While very few participants viewed nature as something external to their culture, notable intergenerational differences emerged. Several respondents observed that, while their parents held distinct traditional perceptions of natural spaces, these views often underwent a process of adaptation and evolution through prolonged exposure to new environments (cf. Reyes Bernard et al., 2025). Younger or second-generation participants might adopt new practices, while older generations might be more interested in activities more closely linked with cultural practices such as growing (Kell et al., 2018). Walking might not be traditional in all cultures, but as Ono et al. (2020) demonstrate, engagement with natural spaces can facilitate evolving cultural identities and values rather than being simply constrained by them. Underlying these findings is a significant variance across both groups and individuals, a complexity supported by research indicating that cultural relationships with greenspace often diverge among different migrant populations (Jay & Schraml, 2009). These relationships emerge from the interplay of

individual and collective life stories rather than from ethnicity alone. The breadth of migratory history and heritages represented here underscores a complexity that defines how individuals relate to the natural world. This suggests that connections to nature are not static but are instead produced through a shifting dialogue between personal history and cultural identity.

The pandemic emerged in our analysis as a critical temporal factor that brought everyday practices and emerging nature connections into sharper focus. Several participants described how COVID-19 prompted a re-evaluation of their daily routines, rendering previously unconscious habits more visible and deliberate. Recent research highlights a dual narrative in this regard: while lockdowns acted as a catalyst for increased greenspace engagement (Gatersleben et al., 2024; Testa, 2025), they simultaneously exposed deep-seated health and environmental inequalities driven by structural factors (Geary et al., 2021). Within this context, our findings move beyond documenting disadvantage to consider how broader observations regarding how daily 'rhythms' shape engagement with the surroundings (Riley, 2021). We argue that the relationship with nature is a living process of expansion and contraction, allowing individuals to maintain nature connections through both periods of stability and profound societal disruption.

3.2 | Natural spaces with friends are my go-to

The second narrative (Box 2) reflects the perspectives of participants who prioritise immersive sensory experiences in nature over the opportunities available in urban greenspaces. This account is constructed primarily around younger participants such as BC and AV, for whom the intersection of social connection and nature engagement was particularly significant. Alongside these themes, the narrative addresses unpleasant encounters, illustrating how unwelcoming attitudes can permeate their interactions. Rather than viewing these attitudes as absolute or pathological barriers, the majority of participants framed them as factors intricately woven into their own expressions of agency and their nuanced understanding of social dynamics. Finally, the narrative explores the substantial practical barriers urban users encounter when seeking access to more rural environments.

The narrative above relays how sensory and immersive experiences become woven into daily life with the specific example of accessing nearby woodland that offered a distinct sensory and psychological experience. Research elsewhere has shown these environments to be particularly important for people living in cities (O'Brien et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2019) and appears also in relation to ethnicity as urban forests can serve as spaces for social integration, emotional connection and belonging for migrants (Jay & Schraml, 2009).

Urban parks were identified as vital spaces for immediate access and social interaction, for example, St George's Park, a centrally located greenspace. However, participants who could access 'more natural' environments consistently described deeper immersion and greater psychological benefit. Complementary research shows that designated sites valued for ecological quality and aesthetics provide higher levels of psychological restoration and connectedness to nature (Wyles et al., 2019). While this reflects long-standing debates around the natural–built environment dichotomy in environmental psychology, it also highlights structural inequalities, as ethnic minority groups are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas with reduced access to such spaces.

For those able to visit them, sensory engagement through water, wildlife and immersion supports restorative experiences through both being away and 'soft fascination' (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Crucially, Elliott et al. (2026) provide quantitative evidence that nature visits taken by non-White British and lower socioeconomic respondents are characterised by significantly higher ratings of 'psychological richness' than those of the general population. This suggests that, while structural barriers may limit the frequency of such encounters, the resulting experiences are often more novel, complex and perspective-changing. By moving beyond simple enjoyment towards these psychologically rich encounters, we can better understand how nature sustains interest and leads to a deeper understanding of the natural world for those who navigate significant constraints to reach it. The social benefits were also key to many participants' experiences, with the example of a WhatsApp group demonstrating how visits with friends enhanced nature encounters. Statements such as 'I really started enjoying being outside because I had friends' were illustrative of how social networks facilitated nature engagement.

In reviewing urban greenspace use among young people, Lyons et al. (2022) identified social activities as one of the primary ways young people utilise these areas. This finding is supported by the way social cohesion contributes to community well-being through urban green infrastructure in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods (Jennings et al., 2017). Taken together, opportunities for breaking down barriers through activities that leverage social support mechanisms should be prioritised. These spaces are serving as sites for nurturing social relationships rather than just facilitating individual experiences, which echoes Hartig's (2021) concept of 'relational restoration' and how restorative processes occur not only individually but also within relationships. Hartig theorises that where interpersonal dynamics enhance emotional bonds, collective experiences amplify restorative effects. This may be particularly important in research on marginalised or displaced groups where mutual support may be even more crucial (Horolets et al., 2019).

Structural and infrastructural constraints emerged as significant barriers to countryside access, as evidenced by participants noting that many ethnic minority residents lack the private transport necessary to reach these areas (AU). These constraints exemplify the intersectional nature of our data, where economic factors and the disproportionate concentration of ethnic minority communities in urban centres converge. Such communities often face restricted access to high-quality greenspaces due to inadequate transport infrastructure, a challenge that is further compounded by the experiential barriers and discrimination detailed in our narratives (Comber et al., 2008; Rigolon, 2016). This layered effect directly influences decision-making regarding greenspace and can result in patterns of avoidance (Cronin-de-Chavez et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2023).

BOX 2 'Natural spaces with friends are my go-to'

I'm a student, in my last year and now it's *just* about *getting through to be honest. I've got a holiday right after so I'm looking forward to* getting away. I live in the east of Bristol, but *I was born in Jamaica, and I came here* at *the age of two, three—very young.*

I'm lucky enough to live in an area where I have multiple wooded areas. Right *behind my house, if I walk to the back road*, I'm surrounded by a *massive, wooded area. When I have a spare* 5 or 10 *min I go in there*. I wouldn't say I'm *really an open space kind of guy, I like trees around me*. There are some *lovely* parks *nearby, such as St. George Park. I feel positively about these areas but the woods behind my house are my go-to because they're so close. There's another wooded area near my local shop, complete with a little lake winding through it. It's beautiful, especially when the weather's nice*, and *Leigh woods is* also *beautiful* I *went the other day with my brother.*

Sometimes, I go with a friend that lives locally to me. We just go for a walk, and *we just talk because we both believe in the importance of connecting with nature. During the summer I like to meet up with my friends—we even have a WhatsApp group where we'll just be like, "does anyone fancy going for a walk in the woods next weekend", and then we'll all just go together. That's how I got into being outside*. It *sounds really stupid, but I really started enjoying being outside because I had friends, and we'd go together. I'm happy to go on my own, but I just prefer to go with other people. It's like a nice social thing to catch up and have a chat while we go for a walk*.

Just by being out there, what it does psychologically. You look around you listening, you know, because sometimes you're walking around. You don't even hear the birds. They're there but we're not hearing them. But I mean, if you sort of focus your mind when you're out there, you'd be amazed what you can hear and see and I think we just saw quite blinkered, sometime in our busy lives. Walking on my way to uni or *meeting friends in the city doesn't quite compare; that's not really enough. You know, you're in* a *city*, a *heavily populated area* which can be *overstimulating. There's something quite different about being inside the woods where you really can kind of be completely consumed by those trees*.

To be honest, if I drove, I'd definitely be into exploring more rural places. *The only place I could say I've been to like that is the Forest of Dean and that was* to stay in a *lodge with my girlfriend*. For me, *it's just about more public transport* and *supporting people with access in cities—that's what I'd like to see more of!* The only other issue is *sometimes I have got certain looks* from *older, White people. But because I'm a smiley person*, I think *no matter what ethnicity you are, you 'can pass it on'* with a *little smile or nod*. There's *been times where I've done that and not got one back*, but *I don't really look into it too much; I just move on my day* because *it's not something I can control. I don't want to base it on the race, but we're* just *very different—different backgrounds, different ages, different experiences … I don't really let anyone make me feel unwelcome*.

Contributing participants: BC, AC, BS, AB, BK, BL.

Text in italics pertains to verbatim quotes while plain text indicates author contributions.

However, it is essential to recognise that this process of 'othering' in which greenspaces become racialised through negative social interactions (Hassen, 2025) is not a universal experience. Instead, it underscores how these layers of exclusion are felt differently across various individuals and groups. Drawing from these intersectional insights to develop inclusive placemaking strategies requires sensitivity to difference that extends beyond ethnicity to include social, cultural and area-level factors (Rishbeth et al., 2022). The contested nature of parks emerges not only between ethnic groups but also across age, practices, cultures and social classes (Barker et al., 2019).

3.3 | Free and accessible urban greenspaces!

The third narrative (Box 3) explores another dimension of our findings through the perspectives of parents such as AU, AQ and AG. For these residents, urban parks serve as vital safeguards for greenspace access, offering a direct contrast to the economic and infrastructural barriers associated with rural destinations. Residing primarily in lower income, multi-ethnic areas, these parents often expressed a preference for local greenspaces that facilitate cultural motivations, social gatherings and family-oriented activities. However, the narrative also incorporates negative experiences related to environmental and social factors, including weather and issues with dogs. These elements emerged as significant influences on daily routines, particularly for participants of Caribbean heritage or those from the Islamic community.

Our thematic analysis and accompanying composite narrative demonstrated how experiences of greenspace are shaped through intersecting dimensions of gender, race, class, migration and parenthood, aligning with the view that greenspace access is not a uniform experience but one structured by overlapping inequalities. As Garland (2025, p. 3) explains, intersectionality examines 'how historically and socially constructed identity markers combine, producing specific subjectivities informing varying experiences of marginalisation'. The participant's reliance on local parks as free, restorative spaces reflects both empowerment and constraint: as a low-income single mother and migrant, she navigates a landscape in which affordability, cultural belonging and safety interact to shape her family's engagement with nature. Greenspaces are said to be 'bounded

BOX 3 'Free and accessible greenspaces!'

I live in the south of Bristol, which is very, very green, and *basically, I took part in this because it was about the greenspaces. I personally love going out because it's very nice for your eyes! I'm not from here, I'm from* Doha, *and if the weather's great, then you know that that's quality for me but during the* winter *months, it tends to be really depressing.*

I have a toddler who is *two and a half* and *a son who is 7 years old now. I'm a single parent* and *I have a very limited financial budget. I know it's not directly relevant, but we tried to get to* greenspaces *whenever I can but there's so many of the things to sort out* like *bills. So, I just take him to places which have the free activities, and the most free thing in this country is the playgrounds and the parks.*

We go to local parks *a couple of times a week* because *you want to* be a *role model and think about them and their future.* It's *just to keep my son away from the iPads and phones and* interact *with other kids basically. There's not many kids in our neighbourhood so if we go to the park,* they *get to play with other kids. I mean, I do it* for me *equally, but mainly* to *give* them *that free space where* they *can go and explore and play outside.*

People don't seem to have the time. Like, in summer, you find obviously, a lot more people in the holidays go to the parks. But as time has gone on to place, parks and, and heritage spots it's affordability. So, we will consider, for example, National Trust, but because of how expensive it is, we would rather go you know, places where we don't have to pay because we've got kids.

I used to take him to one *park* which *had some good number of rides for the kids. But since I wasn't feeling welcoming over there, I stopped taking him over there because I found people you know I maybe they were rough, or they were just racist. My kids, they say, "I don't like to play in this area because it's too noisy, too shouty, too fighty".* We *travel* to *the other side of the city,* which *transport-wise is not easy. We go* to *Eastville where they are happier. Eastville* is *very nice but* Hengrove—*it's still number one*! Some *families won't stay for so long because* of *dogs.* If *they are leashed it's fine* but *some* owners *are rude and just unleash* them *and it* becomes *difficult* for us.

But my kids love it, they shout *"let's go* to *Hengrove" "oh mum, we like that park".* Sometimes, we *take picnics* and sit *for 6 h, 7 h* and *enjoy it. We just love soaking in sun* while they're *playing—I can just sit down and relax. And you know, I feel that's the time you can like think a lot like unwind things.*

I used to think you can do it at home also, but I have noticed a change when I'm more outdoors I have better you know, my mental peace and I'm in a better state.

Contributing participants: BI, AG, AQ, AJ, BO, BQ, AM, BM, BF.

Text in italics pertains to verbatim quotes while plain text indicates author contributions.

by a variety of structural, community and individual determinants' (Cronin-de-Chavez et al., 2019, p. 118) which becomes especially significant for families without private gardens or where paid activities are out of reach. Parental decisions around greenspace in these scenarios then become driven by economic necessity as much as by well-being.

Adding to the complexities across people's experiences were references to environmental constraints such as weather restrictions, with AG's reference to winter months being 'really depressing' being instructive in how seasonal variations can pattern access and experiences for all communities. While weather affects everyone's access and enjoyment of greenspaces, cold and wet weather presents additional challenges for people adapting to Britain's variable climate (cf. Arnberger et al., 2021). Rather than attributing these patterns to static cultural preferences, this observation highlights how environmental conditions create shared experiences that shape engagement with outdoor spaces across all demographics. As Lennon et al. (2017) argues, weather conditions fundamentally alter the functionality of greenspaces by reshaping their potential uses and perceived opportunities for recreation regardless of a user's background. Consequently, the provision of weather-resilient features, such as shelters, all-weather paths and covered play areas, becomes essential in low-income and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. In these settings, such enhancements are particularly impactful for residents who may have fewer alternative recreational options at their disposal (Cronin-de-Chavez et al., 2019).

Within the third narrative, transport serves as a mediator of greenspace access. Specifically, a heavy reliance on public transport can constrain usage by increasing journey times and introducing layers of logistical complexity that discourage frequent engagement (Mears et al., 2019). These practical constraints often force households to compromise between local, but potentially less desirable, spaces and more distant, higher quality parks—a choice that disproportionately affects those without private transport options. In the specific example, Eastville and Hengrove parks are approximately 2 and 6 miles away from the participant's residential area. Such transport-based constraints represent a form of spatial marginalisation that compounds other forms of social and economic exclusion, creating layered barriers to access that manifest in everyday spatial practices. The social qualities of such spaces, including experiences of feeling unwelcome or encountering antisocial behaviour, become entangled with these material barriers, revealing how spatial and

social boundaries are mutually reinforcing in urban environments. These experiences form part of a broader matrix of exclusionary factors alongside practical considerations like dog presence and facilities, which may be particularly relevant for people from non-western backgrounds (Ward et al., 2023).

Our interviews revealed how social cohesion is negotiated through everyday encounters in greenspaces, shaped by safety, comfort and belonging rather than by access alone. The preceding narratives captured how certain parks were deemed 'too noisy, too shouty, too fighty', showing that perceptions of the social qualities of space influence how families assess and use different spaces. This echoes the work of Schinasi and Lawrence (2024), who highlight how the social atmosphere of a park, including its civility, inclusivity and sense of safety, becomes central to its perceived quality. The participants' selective use of large parks such as Hengrove and Eastville reflects an accumulation of local knowledge through which families learn to navigate urban greenspaces and develop routines around locations that feel welcoming. When social and environmental conditions align, specifically through accessible facilities, friendly users and perceived safety, families extend their stays and transform these parks into spaces of conviviality and shared well-being.

These perspectives align with Peters et al. (2010), who argue that urban parks stimulate social cohesion through informal interactions and emotional attachment when users feel secure. In this study, participants favoured parks that function as dual sites of social connection and mental restoration. This preference substantiates the positive relationship between greenspace engagement, community cohesion and mental health recently identified by Wilson et al. (2024). However, her decision to avoid spaces where she 'wasn't feeling welcoming' or experienced racism works to reinforce Jennings et al.'s (2024) point that the social benefits of greenspace are contingent upon inclusion and a genuine sense of belonging. When well-designed, well-maintained and socially safe, greenspaces can facilitate the kind of everyday encounters that build trust and belonging; when exclusionary dynamics dominate, they risk strengthening existing divides (Gobster, 1998). The participant's narrative thus illustrates how social cohesion in urban nature is relational and contingent, emerging not simply from proximity to greenspace but from the quality of the social worlds that unfold within it.

3.4 | Findings and reflections

Across the three composite narratives, the findings show that greenspaces are deliberately embedded into everyday life as vital coping strategies that support psychological restoration, social connection and family well-being, particularly in the context of urban living. Nature engagement emerges as a relational and dynamic practice shaped by social networks, intergenerational change and life circumstances, rather than by fixed cultural preferences or ethnic identities. At the same time, these practices are unevenly enabled by structural conditions, with affordability, transport, safety, weather and social inclusion determining whether greenspaces can function as accessible, restorative and welcoming environments.

We observe how these findings are relevant not only to those interested in nature inclusivity but also to researchers investigating processes of restoration. This is a field that continues to be dominated by positivistic methodology and standardised theory yet remains limited in its engagement with diverse lived experiences. We argue that these nuances require urgent focus because, while extant literature extensively documents the health benefits of nature, the current emphasis on their universality often masks the structural inequities that dictate their reach.

We believe that new research like Elliott et al. (2026) is vital for bridging geography and environmental psychology by linking socio-spatial disparities to psychological richness. This construct, defined by novelty, interest and perspective change, was reported more strongly by populations often excluded from nature, such as non-White-British and lower socioeconomic groups. Such findings suggest that the effort to overcome exclusion results in unique, 'equigenic' and perspective-shifting encounters. It is this inherent tension between theoretical universality and the particularity of lived experience that is arguably addressed by the methodological shift towards the composite narratives explored in the following section.

3.5 | The value of composite narratives for presenting thematic analysis of greenspace engagement

We trialled composite narratives as an alternative presentation for thematic analysis under the premise that they provide the opportunity to communicate accessible cognisable snapshots of research findings contextualise within the everyday experiences of our participants. This approach was also chosen to enable a presentation that counters typical deficit-based approaches which disproportionately communicate constraints over positive experiences in research with minoritised populations. While effective, our composite narratives have limitations in this context. However, their primary strength lies in bridging the gap between research findings and the daily lives of participants, providing an accessible window into their lived experiences. By intentionally highlighting agency alongside the navigation of barriers, these narratives offer a more balanced and humanising account of how nature is integrated into the fabric of urban life. Akin to accessible formats suitable for policymakers and non-academic audiences through alternative presentations and plain English summaries or 'personas' (Gonzalez de Heredia et al., 2018), the narrative approach enables multiple factors to be explored in context, and the 're-presentation' of participants' words offers a concise way of discussing these elements in a contextualised manner, rather than as a 'closed, singular and passive version of out-thereness' (Law, 2004, p. 139). In this vein, it makes sense for scholars to further explore composite narratives as alternative or additional formats for scientific communication.

The second benefit of composite narratives is their capacity to sensitise intersectional understandings by illustrating the differential and co-constituting nature of oppression through coherent storytelling. For example, our approach captured the myriad positive experiences of UK ethnic minority participants while remaining sensitive to the dynamic and non-uniform impact of constraints that disproportionately affect minoritised groups. However, while we believe that this method was effective, it is not intended to supersede the normative thematic analysis common in nature inclusivity literature. Indeed, this approach may trade a degree of specific depth for narrative breadth when communicating how these constraints are experienced alongside other intersecting factors.

Finally, we believe that our approach successfully provides essential counternarratives that balance the study's findings and avoid an overemphasis on deficits. By coordinating multiple perspectives into a cohesive format, these narratives offer a nuanced and holistic understanding of the participants' engagement with greenspace. To further elevate this methodology, we recognise that future research representing the voices of others would benefit from the active involvement of participants and stakeholder groups in the curation and confirmation process. This reflexivity also extends to our findings regarding the diary method. Given its limited uptake, offering the diary as a stand-alone option may enhance inclusive participation, though such strategies typically yield greater success when embedded within participatory action frameworks featuring deeper collaboration with community organisations (Wang & Burris, 1997).

4 | LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. Our strategy of recruiting participants from diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds across Bristol may have partially dampened the potential for highly localised, sensitised policy approaches. While this broad scope offered the valuable advantage of uncovering cross-cutting themes, an approach centred on a singular community or ethnic group might have yielded more granular and targeted interventions. Furthermore, the sample was modestly over-represented by individuals already predisposed towards nature engagement. While this is a common outcome of self-selecting qualitative research, future studies that successfully facilitate deeper dialogues with those who 'do not visit' would be instrumental in further dismantling constraints. Here, we also acknowledge the limited uptake of the diary method; only four participants chose this format, which reduced our ability to gather more situated, real-time visual data and further furnish our composite narratives.

Significant methodological considerations also involve the reliance on English as a secondary language for several participants. Although these interviews frequently revealed powerful emotional expressions through direct, emotive language, we recognise that certain linguistic and cultural nuances were inevitably lost. This may have influenced our composite narratives by potentially flattening some cultural specificities in favour of recurring themes. To elevate this approach in future research, more active involvement of participants and stakeholders in curating and confirming the narratives—particularly across language differences—would be beneficial. In the current study, an optimal, second phase of member checking specifically for the composite narratives was not possible due to ethical constraints regarding personal data storage and participants opting out of future contact. Pre-arranging or foreshadowing this endpoint with participants might be useful, although we contend that participation for many is desired as a one-off commitment not as a sustained endeavour.

5 | CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

By (re)representing the lived nature experiences of UK ethnic minority participants through composite narratives, this paper expands our understanding of greenspace use and well-being practices. We uncover how psychological restoration becomes deliberately embedded within personal well-being strategies, moving the depiction of greenspaces beyond casual recreation towards recognising their role as vital coping strategies. By reinforcing that nature's benefits are universal yet potentially more impactful across ethnic minority groups and showing that nature experiences are met with enthusiasm, we counter simplistic narratives around disconnection and disinterest. We recognise nature engagement as a dynamic and evolving practice shaped by diverse cultural contexts, social relations and temporal scales, ranging from generational shifts to local and global scale disruptions. Ultimately, while improving access to the wider countryside is crucial, prioritising day-to-day access and facilities for those who need it most, particularly in densely populated and low-income urban areas, must be the primary focus.

Translating these insights into practice requires coordinated action through existing national and local policy frameworks that already recognise the role of nature in supporting public health, community cohesion and environmental justice. The prioritisation of high-quality greenspace provision within walking distance of underserved communities aligns with the Natural England's (2021) GI Framework and the NHS's preventative health agenda (DHSC, 2025), which emphasise embedding nature within everyday environments to support mental well-being. National planning policies also provide routes for mandating inclusive, socially oriented infrastructure that supports collective engagement and family use (MHCLG, 2025a, 2025b). Addressing structural barriers to accessing high-quality and rural greenspaces can be advanced through local transport plans and initiatives within the *Recovering Nature Strategy* (Natural England, 2025a) and *Pride in Place* agenda (MHCLG, 2025c). Meanwhile, enhancing year-round accessibility and managing issues of coexistence and conflict can be achieved through climate-resilient design, regulatory tools and strategies relating to animal welfare and public space management (Defra, 2025; Home Office, 2024). Finally, participatory governance mechanisms enabled through the Localism Act (2011), and levelling up initiatives offer pathways for devolving decision-making and stewardship to neighbourhood-level

organisations. Together, these existing policy routes provide an actionable foundation for planners, scholars and policymakers to work together towards a more holistic and responsive approach to nature, health and well-being.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Andrew K. Palmer conceived the ideas, designed methodology, collected and analysed the data and led the writing of the manuscript. Mark Riley, Beth F. T. Brockett, Laurence Jones, Sarah Clement and Karl L. Evans provided guidance, contributed to research design and methodology development and reviewed and edited manuscript drafts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and the terms of participant consent, which were established to protect participant privacy and confidentiality. The research involves sensitive personal information and detailed accounts from identifiable minority communities.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

Data S1.

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