



“Nature’s Healing Touch: The Role of Landscapes in Mental Health Rehabilitation Centers in Nigeria”

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ABSTRACT

Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour (or a combination of these). Mental illness is common. Each year: Nearly one in five (19 percent) U.S. adults experience some form of mental illness, one in 24 (4.1 percent) has a serious mental illness, one in 12 (8.5 percent) has a diagnosable substance use disorder (Ranna, 2018). In Nigeria, an estimated 20%–30% of our population are believed to suffer from mental disorders (Onyemelukwe, 2016). This is a very significant number considering Nigeria has an estimated population of over 200 million (worldometers, 2019). Unfortunately, the attention given to mental health disorders in Nigeria is at best, fleeting; the level of awareness of the Nigerian public on mental health issues is also understandably poor, and the misconceptions regarding mental health have continued to flourish (Suleiman, 2016).

This paper explored the significance of the landscape in mental health rehabilitation centers, emphasizing the transformative role of nature in the healing process. As mental health treatment continues to evolve, the integration of natural surroundings and purposeful landscape design has emerged as a vital component in improving the well-being of individuals seeking recovery. By examining case studies and the principles of therapeutic landscapes within a theoretical & conceptual framework, this paper underscores the profound impact that nature can have on the mental health rehabilitation journey.

Keywords: Mental health, Psychiatric, Rehabilitation, Center, Landscape, Design, Nature, well-being, individuals.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Psychiatric rehabilitation, also known as psychosocial rehabilitation, is the process that facilitates opportunities for persons with chronic mental illness to reach their optimal level of independent functioning in society and to improve their quality of life (Saha et al, 2020). The goal of psychiatric rehabilitation is to help individuals with persistent and serious mental illness develop the emotional, social, and intellectual skills needed to live, learn, and work in the community with the least amount of professional support. Although psychiatric rehabilitation does not deny the existence or the impact of mental illness, rehabilitation practice has changed the perception of this illness. Globally, an estimated 2.4 billion people are currently living with a health condition that may benefit from rehabilitation. The need for rehabilitation worldwide is predicted to increase due to changes in the health and characteristics of the population.

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fleeting; the level of awareness of the Nigerian public on mental health issues is also understandably poor, and the misconceptions regarding mental health have continued to flourish (Suleiman, 2016). Hence the need for a mental health rehabilitation center.

The concept of healing through nature has gained increasing recognition in the realm of mental health care. This paper focuses on the role of landscape design in mental health rehabilitation centers. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To analyze the benefits of nature in mental health recovery.
- To examine case studies of mental health rehabilitation centers with innovative landscape designs.
- To provide recommendations for optimizing landscape design in mental health rehabilitation centers.

Most environmental psychologists agree that the physical environment can reinforce and encourage appropriate behavior (Gabb, Speicher, & Lodl, 1992). The physical environment can reduce the possibility of suicide by avoiding elements that might support hanging or self-injury. Some aspects of the environment, such as nature art, may help reduce stress, pathological behaviors, and aggression. Ulrich, et al. (2012), compared several chemical or physical constraints used in two hospitals and showed that the presence of a bundle of design attributes can decrease patient aggression. In summary, it is firmly established that the physical environment can influence users.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mental Health Rehabilitation

Mental health rehabilitation refers to the process of helping individuals with mental health challenges to recover, restore, or improve their mental health and well-being. It involves a comprehensive and collaborative approach that addresses the psychological, social, and environmental factors contributing to mental health difficulties. Mental health rehabilitation aims to enhance an individual's ability to lead a meaningful and satisfying life, despite the presence of mental health symptoms or conditions.

2.2 Mental Health Rehabilitation Centre

Mental Health Rehabilitation Centre, often referred to as a psychiatric rehabilitation center or mental health facility, is an institution that provides comprehensive and specialized care for individuals experiencing mental health challenges. The primary goal of these centers is to support individuals in their recovery process and help them reintegrate into society.

2.3 Mental well-being and Landscape

Mental health and the environment are interconnected, and the impact of landscapes on individuals, particularly patients dealing with mental health issues, is a topic of growing interest. The concept of using nature and outdoor environments to promote mental well-being is often referred to as "green therapy" or "ecotherapy". There is a growing body of research suggesting that exposure to natural landscapes can have positive effects on mental health and contribute to the overall well-being of individuals, including those with mental health issues. The way natural and built environments are designed and experienced can have significant effects on mental well-being.

The relationship between Mental health and Landscape can be grouped thus;

a. Restorative Environments:

- i. Nature's Healing Power: Natural landscapes, such as parks, gardens, and forests, have been shown to have a positive impact on mental health. Exposure to nature is associated with reduced stress, improved mood, and increased feelings of well-being.
- ii. Restoration of Attention: Natural settings provide a restorative environment that allows individuals to recover from mental fatigue and restore their attention. This is especially relevant for patients dealing with conditions like attention disorders.

b. Therapeutic Gardens:

- i. Designed Healing Spaces: Therapeutic gardens are specifically designed to promote healing and well-being. These spaces often incorporate elements like calming colors, fragrant plants, and comfortable seating to create a soothing atmosphere.
- ii. Benefits for Various Conditions: Therapeutic gardens have been utilized in the treatment of various mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. They offer a non-intrusive, holistic approach to healing.

c. Urban Design and Mental Health:

- i. **Impact of Built Environment:** Urban environments can also significantly affect mental health. Factors such as access to green spaces, walkability, and the overall design of neighborhoods can influence stress levels and mental well-being.
- ii. **Social Interaction:** Well-designed urban spaces that encourage social interaction and community engagement contribute to a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

d. Biophilia and Connection to Nature:

- i. **Biophilic Design:** Biophilia is the innate human tendency to connect with nature. Designing spaces with elements of nature, such as natural light, plants, and water features, can positively impact mental health by fostering a connection to the natural world.
- ii. **Reducing Stress and Anxiety:** Biophilic elements in architecture and interior design have been associated with reduced stress and anxiety levels, contributing to a more positive and calming environment.

e. Cultural Considerations:

- i. **Cultural Relevance:** The impact of landscapes on mental health can be influenced by cultural factors. Different cultures may have varying preferences for certain types of landscapes or natural elements that contribute to well-being.
- ii. **Cultural Gardens and Healing Practices:** Some cultures incorporate specific types of gardens or landscapes into healing practices, recognizing the importance of cultural relevance in mental health interventions.

The connection between mental health and landscapes is multifaceted. Both natural and built environments play a crucial role in shaping individuals' mental well-being, and thoughtful design can contribute positively to the treatment and support of mental health patients. Incorporating nature into therapeutic interventions and urban planning can enhance the overall quality of life for individuals dealing with mental health challenges.

2.2 Attention Restoration Theory (ART)

Attention Restoration Theory (ART) is a psychological framework developed by psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan. It focuses on the idea that exposure to nature and natural environments can help restore and replenish an individual's mental resources, particularly their capacity for directed attention. Key principles of Attention Restoration Theory (ART) include:

a. Directed Attention: Directed attention is the type of attention required for tasks that demand effort and cognitive focus, such as work, studying, or problem-solving. Overuse of directed attention can lead to mental fatigue and reduced cognitive performance.

b. Restorative Environments: ART posits that natural environments provide an opportunity for individuals to take a mental break from the demands of directed attention. These environments offer a more effortless, involuntary form of attention, known as soft fascination. Natural settings with features like trees, water, and wildlife can capture one's attention without requiring conscious effort.

c. Landscape Elements: ART identifies specific landscape elements that facilitate psychological restoration. These elements typically include natural features like greenery, water bodies, and views of natural landscapes. These elements offer a sense of tranquility, visual depth, and complexity that engage the mind without overwhelming it.

e. Applications: ART has been applied in various settings, including mental rehabilitation centers. In such settings, exposure to nature and incorporating natural elements into landscape design can have a therapeutic effect. Patients or individuals seeking recovery in these environments can experience reduced stress, improved mood, and enhanced cognitive performance. The applications of ART in mental rehabilitation settings are designed to create restorative and healing environments that support the recovery process. Patients in these settings can benefit from the psychological restoration provided by natural elements, helping to alleviate the mental strain often associated with mental health challenges. This aligns with the broader idea that contact with nature and natural surroundings can have a positive impact on mental well-being (Basu et al,2019).

2.3 The theory of supportive design is a concept that explores how the built environment can be utilized to reduce stress and promote wellness. It was developed by Roger Ulrich and is based on three principles: Sense of Control, Social Support, and Positive Distractions in physical surroundings. The Sense of Control principle can be implemented through systems that enable the patient to control aspects of the room such as bed position, degree of natural light, control over TV or music, choosing artwork, food, etc. The Positive Distractions principle includes static stimuli such as reading material, photographs, representation of nature, and active stimuli such as music, companion animals, people laughing, etc. The Social Support principle can be supported through comfortable seating for visitors, spaces for family to stay overnight, spaces for social activities, etc. Architecture and design can hinder or promote the healing process. Applying these principles when designing facilities can promote wellness, specifically through the reduction of stress.

a. Sense of Control: This can be implemented through systems that enable the patient to control aspects of the room such as: Bed position, Degree of natural light, Control over TV, or music, choosing artwork, Choosing food.

b. Positive Distractions: These include static stimuli such as: Reading material, Photographs, Representation of nature. Active stimuli include Music, Companion animals, People laughing.

c. Social Support: Environments that allow social support to happily thrive are key and can be supported through: Comfortable seating for visitors, Spaces for family to stay overnight, Spaces for social activities.

2.4 Benefits of Nature/ Landscape in Mental Health Rehabilitation

Nature has been recognized for its profound positive impact on mental health and well-being. The benefits of nature in mental healing are supported by a growing body of research and anecdotal evidence, Kaplan, (1995). Kaplan's Restoration theory suggests that nature can restore cognitive functions such as attention and concentration. Some key ways in which nature can contribute to mental well-being include:

- a. **Stress Reduction:** Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress levels. Natural environments, such as forests, parks, or waterfronts, promote relaxation and help lower cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress.
- b. **Improved Mood:** Nature exposure is linked to improvements in mood and reductions in feelings of anxiety and depression. The presence of green spaces has been associated with lower rates of mood disorders and a more positive emotional state.
- c. **Enhanced Creativity:** Time in nature has been shown to boost creativity and problem-solving skills. Exposure to natural settings can stimulate the brain in ways that encourage innovative thinking and the generation of new ideas.
- d. **Increased Attention and Focus:** Nature has a restorative effect on attention and concentration. Spending time outdoors, even for short periods, has been found to enhance cognitive function and improve the ability to focus.
- e. **Better Sleep:** Regular exposure to natural light and outdoor activities during the day can help regulate circadian rhythms, leading to better sleep patterns. Improved sleep is essential for overall mental health.
- f. **Social Connection:** Nature provides opportunities for social interaction, whether it's a walk in the park with friends or participating in outdoor activities. Socializing in natural settings can strengthen social bonds and contribute to a sense of belonging.
- g. **Physical Exercise:** Many outdoor activities involve physical exercise, which is known to have numerous benefits for mental health. Exercise releases endorphins, reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, and contributes to overall well-being.
- h. **Mindfulness and Presence:** Being in nature encourages mindfulness and a sense of presence. Nature provides a setting conducive to being in the moment, which can be a powerful antidote to stress and anxiety.
- i. **Improved Self-Esteem:** Interactions with nature have been associated with increased self-esteem and a positive self-image. Being in natural surroundings can help people feel more connected to the world and their place in it.

- j. **Reduced Mental Fatigue:** Exposure to nature can alleviate mental fatigue and restore cognitive resources. This "restorative" effect is thought to result from the calming and attention-restoring qualities of natural environments.

Incorporating nature into one's lifestyle, whether through regular walks in a nearby park, gardening, or other outdoor activities, can have lasting positive effects on mental health. It's important to note that the benefits of nature can complement other forms of mental health support and treatment, and individuals should seek professional advice if they are dealing with serious mental health challenges.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research methodology which involved case study of existing mental health rehabilitation centres/ hospitals and an extensive review of secondary data sources to ascertain the role of landscape in Mental Health Rehabilitation Centers in Nigeria.

Instruments of data collection include photographs, sketches, and oral interviews. The data collected from the case studies were analyzed and presented in the form of pictures, tables, graphic communication, figures, and descriptive analysis.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Case Studies

The following facilities were analyzed to ascertain the level of integration of landscape and its effect on mental well-being; Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Enugu; The Retreat Mental Health Center, Lagos; Center for Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Alicante, Spain.

1. The Retreat Mental Health Centre, Lagos

The retreat healthcare in Lagos is Located at Laaga road, Ewu-elepe, Ijede road, Ikorodu.

The Retreat Healthcare is a world-class in-patient and out-patient facility that provides dignified care for mentally disordered people in Nigeria through therapeutic recovery treatments. It is the first purpose-built privately owned mental health facility in Nigeria, built solely to cater for the therapeutic treatment and recovery of mental health patients. Their treatment program is focused on psychological treatments, recovery, and a therapeutic environment with the support of our skilled Psychiatrists, Mental Health Nurses, Therapist Assistants, an Occupational Therapist, and a top Clinical Psychologist. The facility is situated within a 1-acre site. The current bed space is 20 with a planned growth of 16 beds in the future.

2. Center for Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Spain

It is in Alicante, Spain. The project meets the needs derived from the two entities concurring: on the one hand, a Residence for people with serious mental disorders that do not require hospitalization; on the other the Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration (CRIS) and a Day Centre for persons with serious mental disorders. The building, therefore, provides an open and flexible residential community service for persons with chronic mental disorders that do not require hospitalization; the users, about 50, live in an internship. On the other hand, the Day Centre is a specialized and specific Centre for persons with serious mental disorders, with a great deterioration of their functional capacities and of their social environment, where functional recovery programs and structured activities for the occupation of free time are carried out throughout the day, in an open regime, for several, up to 25 people.

3. Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Enugu

The Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital Enugu (FNHE) is a mental health institution located in Enugu, Nigeria. It is one of the specialized hospitals under the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospitals Board, which is part of the Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria.

- The primary mission of FNHE is to provide specialized mental health services, including diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and community-based mental health care.
- The hospital is dedicated to addressing the mental health needs of the population it serves, contributing to research in the field of neuropsychiatry, and offering training for mental health professionals.

These medical rehabilitation Centre's did not pay attention to Landscape but incorporated a therapeutic garden alongside the centers indicating evidence of its effect in mental well-being. This is also evident from the Attention restoration theory propounded by Kaplan, (1995) and Ulrich, (1997).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study shows that Landscape plays a pivotal role in mental health rehabilitation. Nature contributes to stress reduction, emotional regulation, social connections, and physical well-being.

This paper demonstrated the profound impact of the integration of landscape design on mental health rehabilitation centers. The therapeutic potential of nature in these settings offered a holistic approach to recovery, emphasizing the importance of creating spaces that nurture the mind, body, and soul.

Implications for Mental Health Rehabilitation Centers & Future Directions:

- i. Landscape design should be an integral part of treatment.
- ii. It can improve patient outcomes and overall quality of care.
- iii. Research should continue to explore the evolving field of therapeutic landscapes.
- iv. Further integration of nature in mental health care is encouraged.
- v. Engaging patients in the design process.
- vi. Flexibility in accommodating individual needs and preferences.
- vii. Incorporating sustainable landscaping practices.
- viii. Maximizing biophilic elements to enhance well-being.

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