



# Space, Place and Mental Health (Ashgate's Geographies of Health Series)

*Sarah Curtis*

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There is a strong case today for a specific focus on mental public health and its relation to social and physical environments. From a public health perspective, we now appreciate the enormous significance of mental distress and illness as causes of disability and impairment. Stress and anxiety, and other mental illnesses are linked to risks in the environment. This book questions how and why the social and physical environment matters for mental health and psychological wellbeing in human populations. While putting forward a number of different points of view, there is a particular emphasis on ideas and research from health geography, which conceptualises space and place in ways that provide a distinctive focus on the interactions between people and their social and physical environment.

The book begins with an overview of a rich body of theory and research from sociology, psychology, social epidemiology, social psychiatry and neuroscience, considering arguments concerning 'mind-body dualism', and presenting a conceptual framework for studying how attributes of 'space' and 'place' are associated with human mental wellbeing. It goes on to look in detail at how our mental health is associated with material, or physical, aspects of our environment (such as 'natural' and built landscapes), with social environments (involving social relationships in communities), and with symbolic and imagined spaces (representing the personal, cultural and spiritual meanings of places). These relationships are shown to be complex, with potential to be beneficial or hazardous for mental health. The final chapters of the book consider spaces of care and the implications of space and place for public mental health policy, offering a broader view of how mental health might be improved at the population level.

With boxed case studies of specific research ideas and methods, chapter summaries and suggestions for introductory reading, this book offers a comprehensive introduction which will be valuable for students of health geography, public health, sociology and anthropology of health and illness. It also provides an interdisciplinary review of the literature, by the author and by other writers, to frame a discussion of issues that challenge more advanced researchers in these fields.

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