

Recreational trout fishing and mental health



STUDY PURPOSE

This research aimed to assess the relationship between recreational trout fishing and mental health and well-being, while identifying specific aspects of trout fishing that may enhance anglers' mental health.

Study scope

Nearly 1,900 anglers from across the country participated, making this the largest study of its kind on this topic globally.

Methodology

The study used an online questionnaire and included questions about fishing habits (e.g. frequency, duration, types, and characteristics) and mental health and well-being, which was assessed using validated metrics including the WHO-5 (well-being), K10 (psychological distress), GAD-7 (anxiety), and PHQ-9 (depression).

Key findings

Anglers who fished at least once in the two weeks before completing the questionnaire reported higher well-being scores and lower levels of psychological distress, anxiety, and depression compared to those who did not go trout fishing.

Similarly, anglers who fished at least once in the two months prior to the survey showed higher well-being scores and reduced psychological distress, anxiety, and depression compared to those who did not go trout fishing.

- **Well-being scores increased with more hours fished in the past two weeks, more days fished in the past two weeks, and more days fished in the past two months.**
- **Psychological distress, anxiety, and depression scores decreased with more hours fished in the past two weeks, more days fished in the past two weeks, and more days fished in the past two months.**
- **Each extra hour or day of fishing was linked with an incremental improvement in mental health/well-being score.**

These relationships were consistent across both men and women, as well as New Zealand European and Māori participants.

Anglers who fished in the two weeks before the survey were:

- **52% less likely** to experience moderate-to-severe psychological distress.
- **46% less likely** to experience moderate-to-severe anxiety.
- **52% less likely** to report thoughts of self-harm.

Some specific trout fishing elements were associated with improved well-being and mental health scores.

- **Anglers who had contact with (waded) in the water had lower psychological distress, anxiety, and depression scores compared to those who did not.**
- **Those fishing with companions reported higher well-being and lower depression scores than those fishing alone.**
- **Fly and boat anglers showed higher well-being scores, and lower psychological distress, anxiety, and depression scores compared to spin anglers.**
- **Successful anglers (those who caught a fish) had higher well-being scores than those who did not catch a fish.**
- **Anglers who walked more than 5km while fishing had higher well-being scores than those who walked less than 5km.**
- **There was no association between angling environment (urban, modified, rural, or backcountry) and any mental health score.**

Conclusion

This research highlights a clear link between recreational trout fishing and improved mental health and well-being among anglers.

Angling may play a valuable role in supporting mental health and reducing pressure on our healthcare system, especially at a time when the well-being of the population is declining and healthcare services are under increasing strain.

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