

A qualitative approach of the environmental determinants of stress and their situational factors: The FragMent project

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Background:

Everyone has to deal with stress on a daily basis. However, since stress is a risk factor for 75-90% of diseases, it has become a public health priority. According to the stress restorative theory, environmental factors may convey both stressful and restorative qualities. However, little is known on how in complex urban environments these stressors are experienced and in what situations. This qualitative study aims to delve into the environmental and situational factors that contribute to momentary and daily stress, as well as social inequalities in stress.

Methods:

This focus groups study is based on 32 adults (18-65 y.) residing in Luxembourg. Seven focus groups, ranging from 4 to 7 participants per group, have been conducted, including mixed and gender-segregated groups. The topic guide invited the participants to discuss their reaction to urban stress (behavioral, psychological and physiological), the identification of urban stressors and their intensity, the situational factors that contextualize how these stressors are experienced over the course of the day, and the differences in the vulnerability to these stressors by social groups (i.e., gender).

Results:

Participants reported a large array of reactions to stressful urban experiences, embodied sometimes by high arousal and low valence reactions. Numerous stressors have been listed including traffic, noise, incivilities, lack of green spaces, inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, road safety, etc. Situational factors have contextualized when, with whom, during which activities such factors were experienced. Finally, perceptions of urban stressors seemed to evolve with time and age of participants. The project is funded by the European Union (ERC-2021-STG, FragMent, 101040492).

Keywords: stress; daily mobility; environmental exposure; focus groups

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