

Healing Places: Architecture's hidden role in Mental Health

Abstract

This research paper focuses on architecture through the lens of psychology. The data for this paper was obtained from a survey conducted on 18 Indian individuals ranging from age groups 10–50. The survey had various questions with reference to architecture such as preferred lighting, preferred colors, etc. The responses vary from individual to individual and each response was meaningful and provided a fresh perspective on the impact of spaces in the life of a human being.

Introduction

Every individual experiences happiness, solace and healing differently, but there is one factor that governs this and that is the environment we are surrounded by. The environment of a person also influences their mental well-being, their mood, their behaviour, and it even shapes their character. In today's fast-paced and urbanized world, the importance of designing spaces that nurture mental well-being is often overlooked. Healing spaces matter because they become active agents in supporting mental health and they remind us that, just like medicine, thoughtful designs can nurture a person's health. Spaces that are calming, safe, and thoughtfully designed can make a significant difference in mental health. The findings from the research suggest that architecture has an underappreciated yet vital effect on mental health. It suggests how carefully a structure is needed to be planned out keeping mental health in mind. This study on light, color, surroundings, etc gave significant and meaningful results. The responses vary from one another and every response played an important role in the making of this research paper. It also proves the point that everyone heals in a different way and in a different place. The findings also suggest that most people don't even live in their desired environment which might have taken a slight but significant toll on their mental health.

Methodology

To understand the ideal space for people, a survey was conducted. The survey was designed with 10 questions along with two basic personal information questions. The questions

included 7 quantitative questions (Multiple Choice Questions) and 3 qualitative questions (short answer responses). The questions covered a wide range from color theory, to open vs. closed spaces, types of environments, lighting, and their emotional responses to different architectural designs. The survey questions are displayed below to provide a basic glimpse into the range of architectural elements considered and how they might influence an individual's mental well-being.

Survey Questions:

1. What kind of lighting calms you?
 - a) Soft Warm
 - b) Cool
 - c) Colored Party Lights
 - d) Natural Light
2. Out of these FOUR places, which one do you prefer the most?
 - a) Big City; skyscrapers, night lights etc
 - b) Nature Oriented parks and gardens
 - c) Towns with both simple buildings and greenery
 - d) A coastal area with peaceful small homes
3. Do you prefer open or enclosed spaces (Enclosed/Closed)
4. What wall colors would you like?
 - a) White, Cream, Beige
 - b) Blue, Green, Grey
 - c) Pink, Red
 - d) Yellow Orange
5. Do you focus the same way in every place? (Yes/No)
6. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you think your surroundings affect your mood? (1-10)
- 7) Do you prefer a spacious or a decor rich space? (Spacious/ Decor Rich)
- 8) What is one small change you wish to see in the architecture of your surroundings?
- 9) Have you ever felt anxious/sad/uncomfortable in a place because of the design of the way it looks? If so, describe the design and why you think it made you feel that way.
- 10) What type of place makes you the happiest?

Findings

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS:

Lighting:

Lighting is an extremely crucial part of our lives. The environment around us presents different types of light and these types of light can improve or degrade the mental health of a person. The types of lighting were broken into four simple categories for better clarity among individuals, these are: Soft Warm, Cool, Colorful party lights, natural light and the question asked was “What type of lighting calms you?”.

The responses were obtained from 18 individuals which are:

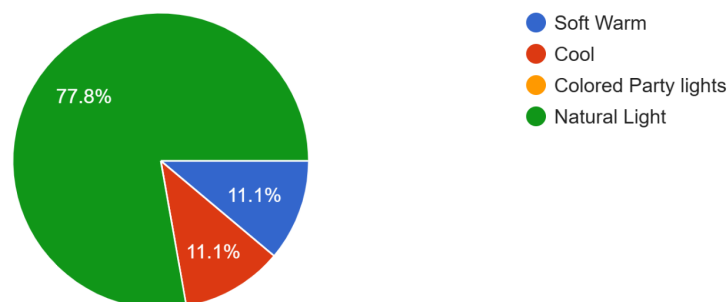
The majority of individuals (77.8% / 14people) preferred natural light as their calming agent, while others (11.1%, 2people) preferred soft warm light and (11.1%, 2people) preferred cool light. Interestingly, none of the individuals chose colored party lights.

These results show that most individuals (despite different ages) prefer simple and natural lighting over complex or overly colorful environments, which may cause tension and anxiety.

Chart:

Chart by google forms:

What kind of lighting calms you?
18 responses



Preferred Environment:

There are many types of environments around us, but most of us have been confined to an environment we do not prefer. The options given for this question were vast and different from each other. The types of places given were: Big cities: skyscrapers, night lights etc, nature oriented parks and gardens, towns with both simple buildings and greenery, a coastal area with peaceful and small homes. These questions were the ones that

provided the vastest responses and also revealed a lot about different preferences of different age groups.

Note: The age group is highlighted in only this sub-topic due to a pattern among preferable choices

The majority of individuals (55.6%, 10 people) selected 'A coastal area with peaceful small homes', most of the participants who preferred this option ranged from the ages 30-45. 'Nature oriented parks and gardens' was chosen by four individuals (22.2%) the age groups of the people who preferred this option ranged from 27-50 years. 'Big City; skyscrapers, night lights etc' were preferred by 2 individuals (11.1%) both being teenagers and two individuals (11.1%) chose 'Towns with both simple buildings and greenery' and they were aged around the age of 35.

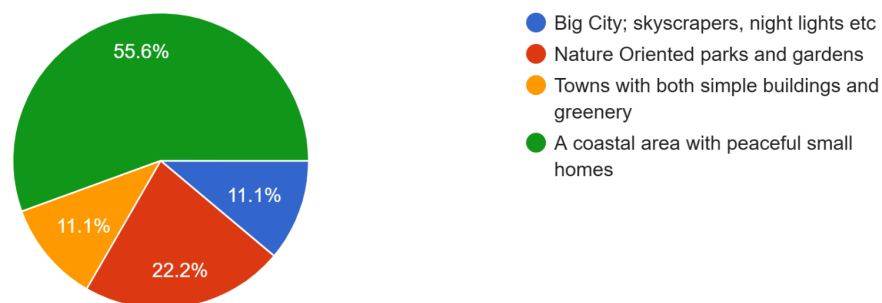
These results suggest that the younger generation tends to prefer urban settings whereas the older generation tends to prefer places in a natural setting. This indicates that age may influence environmental preference and spaces must be designed considering the age group.

Chart:

Chart by google forms

Out of these FOUR places which one do you prefer the most?

18 responses



Open vs Enclosed Spaces:

Openness or enclosure in a space play a key role in the mood of the person. Open spaces may provide freedom and declutter the mind whereas closed spaces may provide a sense of safety and comfort. However, different people have different preferences. Participants were asked whether they preferred closed or open spaces and the results provided a meaningful result on personal comfort and where a person finds themselves at a better place.

The responses were obtained from 18 individuals which are:

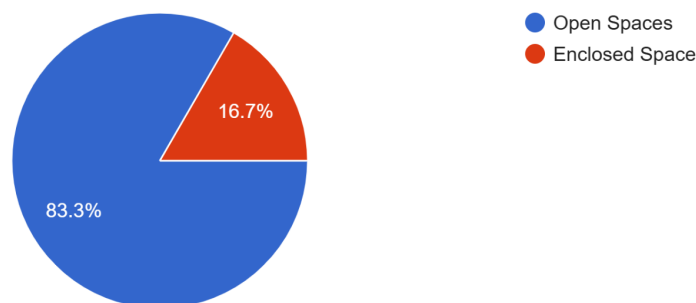
The majority of individuals (83.3% / 15people) preferred open spaces, whereas the rest (16.7%, 3people) preferred enclosed spaces. There was no significant pattern regarding age patterns.

These results show that most individuals would have freedom and less stress (which open spaces provide) whereas some individuals would rather stay indoors where they feel safe and comfortable.

Chart:

Chart by google forms:

Do you prefer open or enclosed spaces
18 responses



Wall Color:

Wall color can make or break a structure. Some wall colors reflect a sense of professionalism, comfort, calmness, etc while others reflect a sense of unprofessionalism, clutter, discomfort, etc. The options provided were 'beige, white, cream' (neutrals), 'blue, green, grey' (cool), 'pink, red' (bold), 'orange, yellow' (bright). The results were shocking.

The responses were obtained from 18 individuals which are:

The majority of individuals (94.4%, 17people) preferred 'beige, white and cream' (neutrals), whereas the rest (5.6%, 1person) preferred 'orange, yellow' (bright).

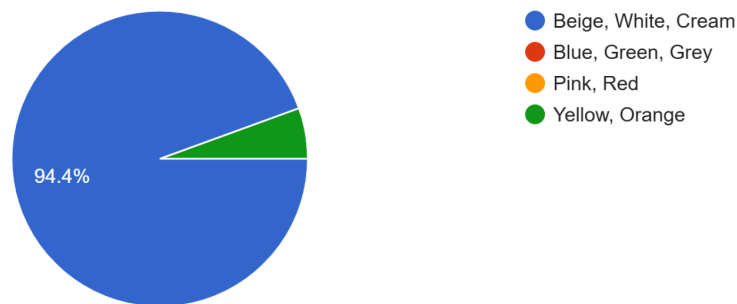
These results show that most individuals prefer neutral colors. These colors are universally seen as the wall colors that reflect calmness and are more mentally supportive.

Chart:

Chart by google forms:

What colors do you prefer a wall to be?

18 responses



Focus:

Focus varies from individual to individual, some people can focus more whereas others have trouble focusing. One of the governing factors of focus is the space we're surrounded by. The question given was "Do you focus the same way in every place", and its options were yes and no.

The responses were obtained from 18 individuals which are:

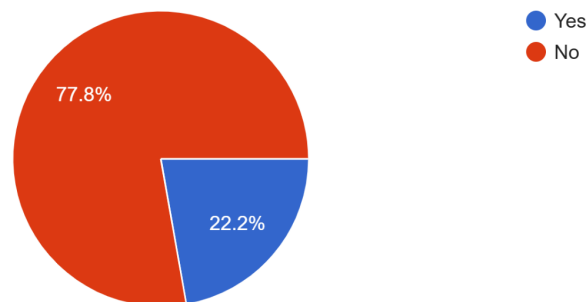
The majority of individuals (77.8%, 14 people) opted 'no' whereas the rest (22.2%, 4 people) opted 'yes'.

These results show that focus varies from person to person. An individual's ability to focus is often influenced by their surroundings. Some people can focus the same way in every place but the vast majority have a certain environment where their focus levels are better.

Chart:

Chart by google forms:

Do you focus the same way in every place
18 responses



Environmental Influence:

The environment we are surrounded by influences our mood and behaviour. This may be a positive or a negative influence. Participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1–10 on how strongly their surroundings affect their mood. This question aimed to measure the direct correlation between environment and emotional well-being.

The responses were obtained from 18 individuals which are:

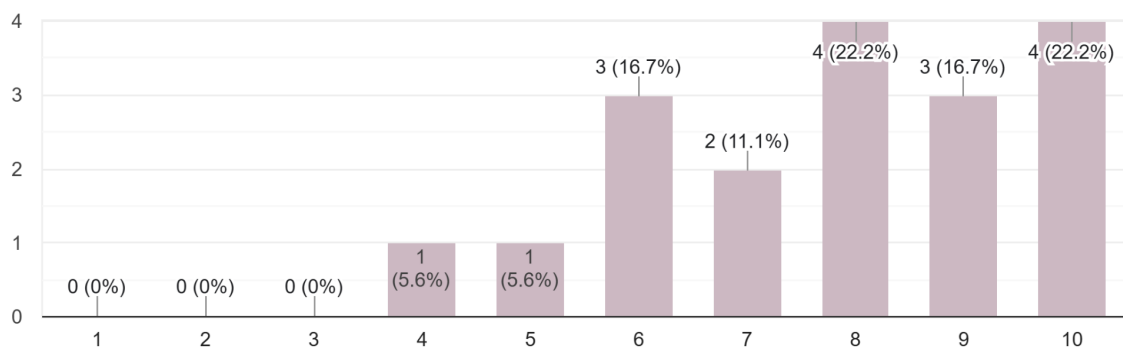
All participants gave a number that is more than 3 which shows most individuals do believe their emotional well-being is directly related with their surroundings. The percentage of each result is: 4(5.6%, 1person), 5(5.6%, 1person), 6(16.7%, 3people), 7(11.1%, 2people), 8(22.2%, 4people), 9(16.7%, 3people), 10(22.2%, 4people). More than half of participants voted a number 7 and above.

These results show that a vast majority of people do believe their environment governs their mental health. It shows the direct correlation between environment and emotional well-being.

Chart:

Chart by google forms:

On a scale of 1-10 how much do you think your surroundings affect ur mood
18 responses



Spacious House vs Decor-Rich House:

Houses can be spacious or decor-rich. Spacious houses represent simplicity and openness whereas a decor-rich house represents vibrancy and detail. Both are meaningful preferences, one offers peace through openness and the other offers warmth through vibrancy. Participants were asked to select either a spacious or decor-rich house as their preference.

The responses were obtained from 18 individuals which are:

The majority of individuals (72.2%, 13 people) opted for a spacious house whereas the rest (27.8%, 5 people) opted for a decor rich house.

These results show that the way an individual prefers the decor in their house is highly personal. While the majority favoured a spacious house, others favoured a decor-rich house. This indicates that both a spacious interior and a decor-rich interior can provide mental support depending on personal taste.

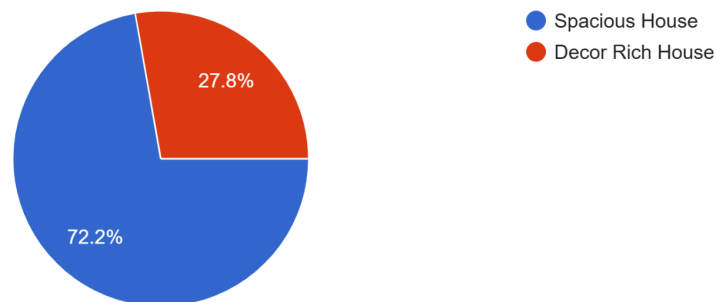
Notable Detail on Shared Preferences: Interestingly, two married couples preferred spacious houses whereas one married couple preferred a decor-rich house which shows that shared living and mutual influence may be able to play a role in the environment an individual desires to be surrounded by.

Chart:

Chart by google forms:

Do you prefer a spacious house or a house with a lot of decor (decor-rich)

18 responses



SHORT ANSWER SCRIPTS:

Architectural Aspirations :

Most people don't live in the place they wish to be in, this short answer script was to find out what types of changes people aspired to see in their surroundings. The question asked was: What is one small change you wish to see in the architecture of your surroundings?

Responses in the form of raw data:

- Greenery (2 responses)
- I want to make them more air flowing
- Traditional apartments models
- More lights and water bodies
- Pleasant atmosphere
- better houses not boring ones!!
- Colours
- Garden
- Buddha idol
- S
- More green spaces and trees around buildings
- Not applicable
- Good sunlight & Garden
- less slums
- Better interior looks of home
- Simple and showcasing Indian roots
- Ground

Responses organized in sub-categories:

Nature and Environment: Better surrounding environment, with cleanliness and nature.

- Greenery
- More green spaces and trees around buildings
Garden
- Good sunlight & Garden
- Less slums (implying better, healthier urban surroundings)
- Ground (implying more natural environment)

Design and Style: Desired styling and structural elements in participants' surroundings.

- Traditional apartment models
- Better Interior looks of home
- Simple and showcasing Indian roots
- Better houses, not boring ones!!

Aesthetics and Additions: Visual elements and features participants wish to enhance their spaces.

- More lights and Water Bodies
- Colours
- Buddha idol

Atmosphere and Space: Comfortable and open spaces that allow good airflow and a pleasant overall environment.

- I want to make them more air flowing
- Pleasant atmosphere

Incomplete Answers: Answers that are vague and give no suggestions

- Not Applicable
- S

Conclusion:

The responses revealed diverse aspirations of many types. These aspirations ranged from increased greenery like greenery and gardens, better surroundings like the reduction of slums and poverty, design features such as better interior looks and traditional apartment models, additions such as lights and buddha idols, and better atmosphere aspirations. However there were vague responses. Overall there is a clear wish for surroundings that are both nurturing and visually pleasing across all the responses.

Uncomfortable Spaces :

Some spaces can cause discomfort to others, to identify those types of spaces that should be avoided in future architecture planning. The question asked was: Have you ever felt anxious/sad/uncomfortable in a place because of the design of the way it looks. If so describe the design and why you think it made you feel that way

Responses in the form of raw data:

Half of the responses were 'no'. The other half of the responses are mentioned below:

- Designs with dark colors and big sky scrapers
- Yes , due to dark colors
- Any house needs proper ventilation. House without ventilation is not good
- Too bright colours make me uncomfortable
- Harsh colours and clumsy rooms
- Yes,uncomfortable in a place leaving with strangers
- Closed home with no sunlight
- Dark colors
- Yes, Garbage throughout

Responses organized in sub-categories

Color-related Discomfort: Uncomfortable or extreme color schemes negatively affect mood and create a sense of unease..

- Designs with dark colors and big skyscrapers
- Yes, due to dark colours
- Too bright colours make me uncomfortable
- Harsh colours and clumsy rooms
- Dark colors

Ventilation and Sunlight issues: Spaces lacking proper airflow or natural light may feel oppressive and reduce overall comfort.

- Any house needs proper ventilation; houses without ventilation are not good
- Closed home with no sunlight

Crowding and Unfamiliarity: Being in crowded spaces or around unfamiliar people can cause discomfort and anxiety.

- Yes, uncomfortable in a place living with strangers

Lack of cleanliness: Untidy or cluttered environments contribute to negative emotions and stress

- Yes, garbage throughout

Conclusion:

These responses prove that some places have the ability to cause mental discomfort, anxiety, and sadness. Places which have uncomfortable elements like poor color choices, lack of sunlight and ventilation, overcrowding, excessive clutter should be avoided to create a

mentally supportive environment.

Healing Spaces :

Healing spaces, they're the spaces that make us the happiest, they nurture the soul and are filled with comfort, peace, and a sense of belonging. Every person heals differently, hence each person has a different type of ideal healing space. This question asked was: What type of place makes you the happiest?

Responses in the form of raw data:

There were many responses that matched. The responses are down below:

- Devotional (preferred by 7 individuals)
- Minimalistic (preferred by 3 individuals)
- Nature-rich places (forests, mountains, beaches, parks) (preferred by 5 individuals)
- Modern (preferred by only 1 individual)
- Childhood Home (preferred by only 1 individual)
- Tuscany styled places (preferred by 1 individual)

Conclusion:

These responses prove that every person has a different way of healing and everyone has an ideal place they heal the best in. However a lot of people find peace, soulfulness, contentment, and happiness in places with devotion, minimalism, nature and emotional attachments.

Conclusion:

This study highlights the profound effect of architecture on an individual's mental health. Lighting, color, space, greenery, cultural touches all contribute to focus, comfort, happiness and peace. Hence, each element must be designed thoughtfully and carefully to provide mental security. Even though individual preferences vary, there is one thing in common, people can thrive in environments that are nurturing, harmonious, and thoughtfully crafted. By understanding an individual's preferences, architects can create places that heal and inspire. Because at the end of the day it is the spaces we inhabit that play a central role in shaping a person's mood, behaviour, and character.