CultureCase

Group singing helps people cope with adverse life events

This research was conducted by **Genevieve von Lob, Paul Camic and Stephen Clift** at **Canterbury Christ Church University, UK**

Summary

The paper reports a series of interviews conducted with 16 people who had experienced an adverse life event (or multiple events) and were also members of a choir. These people used singing as means to cope with their trauma. The interviews showed that people benefited from group singing in two main ways: by being part of a group, and by experiencing positive feelings through the act of singing.

Group singing is a type of leisure activity

The authors categorise singing as a type of leisure activity, and leisure can be a component of a coping strategy. It does this through companionship, enhancing mood, being self-protective, self-restorative, distracting, restoring a connection with the past, and being a means of transformation.

Although small in number, the interviewees were diverse

Of the 16 people interviewed, 11 joined a choir specifically in response to a traumatic life event, the rest were already choir members. The interviewees represented a range of backgrounds, musical ability and singing experience.

The benefits of group singing are social and psychological

The social benefits related to the collective experience of group singing and working towards a common goal. Choir members built meaningful relationships

with others in the group and felt a sense of belonging. The choir was like a family that gave unequivocal positive feedback. The psychological benefits related to becoming competent in a challenging skill, having purpose, meaning and structure in an aspect of one's life, and having a form of escape. In addition, interviewees said they 'accessed' different emotional states through singing, sometimes being moved to tears or choosing to identify with the mood of the music or lyrics. They also were able to cultivate a 'natural high' through the physical and psychological exertion of singing.

Keywords

interview **wellbeing** **singing** **social** **trauma** **UK** **choral**

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