CultureCase

The arts may improve health, wellbeing and vitality

This research was conducted by **Lars Olov Bygren and seven others** at the **Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden and elsewhere**

Summary

The paper reports the results of an experiment in which 101 people were randomly assigned to either engage in an arts experience or do nothing artistic at all. The types of arts experiences ranged from attending concerts, cinema, exhibitions or singing in a choir. The researchers tested the health and wellbeing of each person and determined that even controlling for other factors 'fine arts stimulations improved perceived physical health, social functioning, and vitality'.

Participants were given a curated arts experience once a week for eight weeks

Each engagement involved some form of expert introduction or tuition that preceded and followed the experience. The participants in the control group (50 out of the 101) were told they would receive these experiences after the experiment.

The participants were recruited from amongst healthcare workers in Umea, Sweden (where the researchers were based)

The vast majority of participants were female secretaries, administrators and assistants. They were asked about their ability to undertake tasks without pain or limitation (their perceived health), how energetic or tired they felt (their vitality), and whether their health impeded their social life at all (their social

functioning). Participants were also given short-term memory tests and their levels of cortisol and immunoglobulin were taken before and after the experiment.

Three things to keep in mind

During a necessary break in the eight-week experiment a small number of people (including those in the control setting) engaged in cultural activity outside of the experiment. The authors wonder whether the health and wellbeing measure of the control group was affected by the fact that they had to wait until after the experiment had ended to enjoy the arts experiences that they were due. The participants were not representative of a wider population, being mostly healthy female healthcare secretarial staff.

Keywords

control group **experiment** **Sweden** **wellbeing** **health**

Title	Cultural participation and health: a randomized control trial among medical care staff
Author(s)	Bygren, L O, Weissglas, G, Wikström, B-M, Benson Konlaan, B, Grjibovski, A, Karlsson, A-B, Andersson, S-O & Sjostrom, M.
Publication date	2009
Source	Psychosomatic Medicine, Vol 71, Iss 4, pp 469-473
Link	**http://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Abstract/2009/05000/Cultural_Participation_and_Health__A_Randomized.14.aspx**
Open Access Link	**http://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Fulltext/2009/05000/Cultural_Participation_and_Health__A_Randomized.14.aspx**
Author email	**lars-olov.bygren@prevnut.ki.se**

By **Culture.Case** | 14 April 2014 | **Impacts of arts and culture** , **Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture** |

King's Culture
© Copyright 2026
Designed, developed and maintained by **King's Digital Lab**
Originally built by **weheartdigital Ltd**
Accessibility Statement