

The different effects of group singing on middle-class and marginalised people

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This research was conducted by **Betty A. Bailey and Jane W. Davidson** at the **University of Sheffield, UK**

Summary

Singing in a group can bring profound positive emotional results, though the exact nature of the benefits may vary with the singer's background. This study examined the experiences of Canadian singing groups, comparing members of a choir for homeless and marginalised individuals to middle class people with higher levels of singing and musical training.

Choirs can give people a voice, but in a variety of different ways

Interviews were used to explore in depth the experiences of eight original members of the 25-strong Nova Scotia choir for homeless and impoverished people. Many of these individuals also had a history of substance misuse, imprisonment and/or mental illness. These individuals had gained confidence, emotional balance and a sense of purpose and belonging as a result of joining the choir. Importantly, they also felt that performances had allowed them to inform audiences about the reality of the issues they faced and helped them feel more accepted in society.

Focus groups conducted with eight middle-class members of a range of choirs and musical groups also identified benefits including social interaction, relaxation, improved mood and the sense of a common goal. When compared to members of the choir for marginalised people, the middle-class singers were much more focused on improving their skills as singers and tended to approach singing as a challenge to be conquered. They also felt more anxious about

performing and placed greater pressure on themselves to reach a high standard.

Pressure of high standards may discourage participation

The researchers suggest that the differences in the middle-class and marginalised singers' experiences indicate that placing less emphasis on quality and more on participation may increase both participation and enjoyment with regards to group singing.

This summary is by **Vicky MacBean, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

interview **singing** **class** **Canada** **choral**

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