

How much arts engagement is needed to enhance wellbeing?

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This research was conducted by **Christina Davies, Matthew Knuiman** and **Michael Rosenberg** at the **University of Western Australia**

Summary

Many clinical studies have shown arts-based therapies to reduce anxiety and depression and improve quality of life. This study sought to examine the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental wellbeing in the general population, with a view to considering potential public health strategies.

High levels of arts engagement is associated with better mental wellbeing

The study surveyed over 700 randomly selected people in Western Australia by telephone, asking them how many hours on average they had engaged in arts activities over the past year; this included attendance at arts events, participation in and creation of artworks for pleasure, volunteering in the arts sector, and learning arts-based skills. The researchers assessed mental wellbeing using a standardised questionnaire.

Compared with the rest of the study participants, those who engaged the most (more than 100 hours a year), comprising a quarter of those questioned, showed a noticeably higher mental wellbeing score. This remained true even after accounting for other possible explanations such as marital status, income, religion, sports engagement and physical health. Moderate arts engagement was not associated with better mental wellbeing scores compared to those who did not engage at all, suggesting that 100 hours per year formed a 'threshold' at which the benefit revealed itself.

Threshold effect of arts engagement

The idea of a minimum level of engagement needed to improve mental wellbeing has been suggested by previous studies. This study was not able to demonstrate a causative effect, and the researchers suggest that this should be investigated further in order to determine whether recommendations for arts engagement could be implemented as a public mental health strategy, similar to recommendations for levels of physical activity. This study certainly suggests that two hours per week may constitute an effective 'Art Dose'.

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

Keywords

Australia **survey** **wellbeing**

Title	The art of being mentally healthy: a study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population
Author(s)	Davies, C., Knuiman, M. & Rosenberg, M.
Publication date	2016
Source	BMC Public Health, Vol 16
Link	http://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-015-2672-7
Open Access Link	http://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-015-2672-7
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By **Culture.Case** | 23 January 2017 | **Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture** |



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