

The wellbeing benefits of theatre attendance later in life

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This research was conducted by **Suzanne Meeks, Russell J. Vandembroucke** and **S. Kelly Shryock** at the **University of Louisville, USA**

Summary

This paper looked at the impact of theatre attendance on the wellbeing of a group of Americans aged over 60. The researchers found that attending live theatre ‘may contribute significantly to living well in the latter decades of life’. They used a detailed survey to untangle the various factors that led to increased wellbeing. Theatre performances improved the moods of attendees (mood is known to impact wellbeing). The social aspect of repeated theatre attendance was also an important factor – seeing the same people from time to time, and being part of a communal exchange between others in the audience and the cast. Finally, the need to concentrate, to pay attention, and to be in a state of “flow” was also important for improving the wellbeing of attendees.

The study used questionnaires from 53 theatregoers

The surveys were completed either on paper or online after watching seven different plays across two years. People in the sample were broadly representative of theatregoers but not the wider population: they were ‘nearly all white, of European-American origin, and on average wealthier and more educated than the US or local populations’.

There are reasons to think the results are not generalisable

The most obvious is that people who have signed up to multiple theatre performances are likely to enjoy theatre and arrive at the venue in a good mood expecting to have a good time. Related to this is the fact that ‘people

who derive positive experiences from theatre performances have personality traits that predispose them to derive positivity from many types of activities. These same traits of openness and agreeableness, for example, might also predict long-term wellbeing’.

Keywords

elderly USA survey wellbeing theatre

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