CultureCase

Cultural engagement lowers the risk of developing dementia in old age

This research was conducted by **Daisy Fancourt, Andrew Steptoe** and **Dorina Cadar** at **University College London**

Summary

This paper demonstrates that taking part in community cultural engagement lowers the risk of developing dementia in old age. The research team analysed data from 9,550 adults aged 50 who were part of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing between 2004/05 and 2016/17. It looked for any associations between different types of community engagement and dementia over that 12-year period. Community cultural engagement (which included activities like visiting museums, galleries, theatre, etc.) was associated with a lower risk of developing dementia in older age, regardless of factors like age, income, marital status, etc. Community group engagement (such as attending clubs or societies) was only associated with lowering dementia risk in certain circumstances.

The research explored two types of community engagement

‘Community cultural engagement’ was measured by asking participants how often they visited a museum, art gallery or exhibition, or theatre, concert or opera. ‘Community group engagement’ was measured by asking participants how often they attended meetings relating to a common interest such as a political party, trade union or environmental group, tenants’ group, resident group, neighbourhood watch, church, or other religious group, charitable association, education class, arts or music group, evening class, social club, or any other organisation, club or society. (Answer options for both questions were

‘less than once a year, once or two times per year, or every few months or more’.)

The authors suggest conducting more research on specific types of cultural activity

This would help to arrive at an explanation for what it is about ‘community cultural activity’ that lowers the risk of dementia. The cultural activities measured in this study are predominantly leisure pursuits whereas some of the other community activities have an obligatory or work-like character (as do churchgoing or residents groups), so that might be a factor. Another area to explore is the cultural and social lives of people before they turn 50, and whether a lifetime’s engagement is important in preventing dementia.

Keywords

survey **active** **health** **elderly** **UK** **dementia**

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