CultureCase

Arts engagement is associated with increased wellbeing and connectedness, and less intense loneliness

This research was conducted by **Urszula Tymoszuk** and **five others** at the **Royal College of Music**

Summary

This paper adds to the growing body of evidence on the relationship between arts and wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, the research found that ‘more arts engagement was associated with higher levels of wellbeing, social connectedness, and lower odds of intense social loneliness’. The wellbeing benefits of arts engagement was particularly important for those who tended to be low-intensity arts engagers. However, the study also discovered a ‘positive association between more arts engagement and depression and intense emotional loneliness for the most highly engaged’.

The study was based on a new online survey of more than 5,000 people in the UK

The ‘health, economic, and social impacts of the arts’ survey looked at a wider range of arts activities than most surveys of this type. It also asked about the nature of the engagement – specifically, whether it was done together or alone. This enriched data gathered elsewhere in the survey about the respondent’s social situation: their household, family and friends. The data is a little unusual because the survey attracted a lot of active arts engagers and a disproportionate number of people reporting depression and loneliness.

The data suggested there are three distinct clusters of arts engagers

20 per cent are 'low engagers' who were occasional readers; 44 per cent are 'receptive consumers' who 'read and listened to music frequently' and attended cinema, live music, theatre, exhibitions, and museums; the final 36 per cent were 'omnivores' who 'frequently engaged in almost all arts activities'.

There are some explanations for why omnivorous arts engagement is associated with depression and loneliness

Firstly, the relationship with loneliness and depression was stronger for 'participatory' activities done alone – like playing an instrument – and spending a lot of time alone can contribute to a risk of depression. Secondly, it may be that the omnivores in the sample were already at risk of depression and used the act of writing poetry or playing an instrument as a means of therapy.

Keywords

wellbeing **survey** **health** **UK** **attendance** **participation**

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