

# Cultural activity can improve the health of older people

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This research was conducted by **Gene D. Cohen and five others** at **George Washington University and other institutions, USA**

## Summary

This paper reports the results of a study into the effects of a cultural programme on the physical and mental health of the elderly. The research is based on a study of 166 generally healthy people aged over 65 in the Washington DC area. The research found that after a year of engaging in a programme of cultural activities people improved their mental and physical health, were less reliant on medication, had fewer falls and fewer visits to the doctor when compared to a group of similar adults who had not participated in the activity. They also felt happier and less lonely and were generally more active.

## Research participants were recruited through leaflets and notices in particular places where the elderly were resident or active

By the end of the 12 month period there were 77 people in the activity group and 64 in the comparison group. The participants were asked to complete questionnaires about their health and lifestyle prior to their engagement in the cultural programme, and again after 12 months. These included well-validated scales of morale and depression. The researchers also captured details about the existing levels of cultural activity that each person undertook.

The cultural programme itself consisted of choral singing sessions once a week run by the Levine School of Music conducted by a professional musician. The comparison group had no contact with the research other than completing tests at the start and end of the programme.

## A few things to keep in mind

There are two main reasons why these results may not be generalisable: people elected to either join the choral group or the comparison group – they were not randomly assigned. Also, the sample was not representative of the wider community (more than three quarters of those in the study were female and more than 90 per cent were white).

### Keywords

**USA** **singing** **experiment** **wellbeing** **elderly** **health** **choral**

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| Author email     | <a href="mailto:GENCOWDC@aol.com">GENCOWDC@aol.com</a>                                                                                    |

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