

The benefits of arts engagement for people experiencing mental health issues

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This research was conducted by **Sue Hacking, Jenny Secker, Helen Spandler, Lyn Kent** and **Jo Shenton** at the **University of Central Lancashire** and **Anglia Ruskin University, UK**.

Summary

This paper looked at arts participation among people with mental health needs. It reports improvement in levels of empowerment with promising effects on social inclusion and overall mental health for participants in 22 out of 51 arts projects taking part in a wider UK research project between January and March 2006.

People with more severe mental health concerns reported significant increases in empowerment and mental health improvement

88 new participants aged over 18 and with mental health needs were invited to self-complete questionnaires on empowerment, social inclusion and mental health within four weeks of joining the arts project and again six months later. Results from this sample indicated a significant increase in empowerment and improvement in mental health and social inclusion regardless of demographic characteristics, change in medication, use of mental health services or type of mental health issue experienced.

Participants who believed they would benefit from arts participation truly did

The authors report no changes in occupational or educational activities and the short follow-up period might have prevented these effects from being studied

sufficiently. They also highlight limitations relating to the small sample size of the study, the use of simple questionnaires and not being able to capture a wider range of potential benefits. Finally, they recognise the possibility that participants' mental health might have been stabilised prior to the arts participation, and that some natural improvement over time to have occurred throughout the study.

This summary is by **Anna Kolliakou, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

UK **mental health** **experiment** **participatory**

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