



## SDC Project Spotlight:

scottishdevelopmentcentre  
for mental health

### Arts attendance, participation and mental health

#### About the research

Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health wanted to explore the relationship between mental health, and arts attendance and participation. To achieve this, a population survey was conducted, using the TNS-BMRB Omnibus as the means of data collection. A sample of 1,016 adults was interviewed throughout Scotland over the period 25th November to 2nd December 2009. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, in-home using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing, quota sampling, and weighting against population estimates from the National Readership Survey of 2006.

The survey was divided into two sections: mental health indicators, and arts attendance and participation. No link between these sections was implied.

The shortform seven-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) was used to measure current levels of mental wellbeing. Mental Health questions were self-completion administered rather than interviewer administered, in order to increase levels of honest response.

Wording for the arts attendance and participation questions was consistent with 'Taking part: the national survey of culture, leisure and sport'.

#### Key findings

In total, 66% of the Scottish adult population said they had attended any arts event in the last twelve months, and 64% said they had participated in arts activities during this period.

The vast majority of those who had recently attended or participated in the arts (88%) agreed that doing so helps them to relax and feel better about themselves. There was no significant difference in levels of agreement across the sample indicating that these benefits are widely appreciated by all sectors of the population.

Those who had attended or participated in the arts in the last twelve months responded spontaneously that they did so because:

- It is fun / they enjoy it (81%)
- It is something to do with friends (19%)
- It is relaxing / calming (30%)
- Escapism (13%)
- It is something to do for 'me time' (16%)
- To learn new skills (11%)

Those who currently have the lowest levels of mental wellbeing according to SWEMWBS were significantly less likely to have attended arts events in the last twelve months (67% vs 79% for those with the highest levels of mental wellbeing). In particular, they were significantly less likely to have attended the theatre (13% vs 28% for those with the highest levels of mental wellbeing) or attended an exhibition (9% vs 25% for those with the highest levels of mental wellbeing).

Those with the lowest levels of mental wellbeing were also significantly less likely to have participated in arts events generally in the last twelve months (49% vs 63% for those with the highest levels of mental wellbeing). In particular, they were significantly less likely to have read for pleasure (35% vs 53% for those with the lowest levels of mental wellbeing).

## Conclusions

Mental health is a vital resource that individuals, families, communities and societies need, to be able to thrive. At SDC we strive to create the conditions and opportunities for everyone to enjoy mental health and wellbeing, to draw attention to inequalities in mental health and to seek to address these inequalities.

Attendance of and participation in the arts is enjoyed by a sizable proportion of the Scottish population, and is an activity that is widely perceived to have multiple wellbeing benefits. Despite this, those with poor mental wellbeing are less likely to have recently attended arts events or participated in arts activities.

SDC believes that the experience of having mental health problems can impose multiple barriers to attending and participating in arts and cultural activities. We also believe that arts attendance and participation is a means of enhancing quality of life by promoting good mental health. SDC feels that more should be done to make arts activities accessible to people with mental health problems, and that the part that the arts plays in maintaining and improving mental health for all should be further acknowledged and explored.

## Supporting further work around the arts and mental health

"Culture and the arts have significant value for mental health improvement. The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Scottish Arts Council and, when established, Creative Scotland, and others, to develop increased arts and mental health improvement opportunities and to promote increased access and participation."

*Towards a mentally flourishing Scotland: Policy and Action Plan 2009-2011*

"The Scottish Arts Council is actively involved in promoting diversity in the arts in Scotland and seeks to mainstream an equalities agenda for the benefit of all those who take part in the arts and culture of Scotland. We welcome this important piece of research as it highlights the relationship between mental health and wellbeing and the arts."

*Equalities Department, Scottish Arts Council*

## Contact us

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