

The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on the Physical Health, Mental Health, and Social Functioning of Older Adults

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Purpose: The aim of this study was to measure the impact of professionally conducted community-based cultural programs on the physical health, mental health, and social activities of individuals aged 65 and older. **Design and Methods:** Participants in the study were 166 healthy, ambulatory older adults from the Washington, DC, area. We assigned them to either an intervention (chorale) or comparison (usual activity) group and assessed them at baseline and after 12 months. **Results:** Results obtained from utilizing established assessment questionnaires and self-reported measures, controlling for any baseline differences, revealed positive findings for the effectiveness of the intervention such that the intervention group reported a higher overall rating of physical health, fewer doctor visits, less medication use, fewer instances of falls, and fewer other health problems than the comparison group. The intervention group also evidenced better morale and less loneliness than the comparison group. In terms of activity level, the comparison group evidenced a significant decline in total number of activities, whereas the intervention group reported a trend toward increased activity. **Implications:** The positive impact of participatory art programs for older adults in this study on overall health, doctor visits, medication use, falls, loneliness, morale, and activities reflects important health promotion and prevention effects and a reduction of risk factors driving the need for long-term care.

Key Words: Creativity • Arts • Health promotion • Prevention • Risk reduction