

WHO-Lancet Global Series on health and the arts

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We welcome the launch of a special *Lancet* Series on the health benefits of the artsⁱ. However, as a group of researchers in the field of arts and health, we wish to inject a note of caution, and highlight critical perspectives on substantial scoping reviews of research on the contribution of the arts to healthⁱⁱ.

Critiques of research on music, visual arts, and dance interventions for children and young people experiencing mental health challenges have shown limitations of randomised controlled trials and a scarcity of critical perspective in meticulously conducted systematic reviews and meta-analysesⁱⁱⁱ. Moreover, a rigorous large-scale randomised trial of singing versus standard physical training within community-based pulmonary rehabilitation for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease found only modest improvements in exercise capacity and quality of life (far from the minimum important difference), no improvements in anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, or respiratory function, and no differences in outcomes compared with standard physical training^{iv}. In addition, although recreational engagement with the arts could be beneficial for health and wellbeing, harmful effects of professional career paths in music have been documented^v.

We accept that engagement in the arts and cultural activities could represent a positive health resource, but emphasise the importance of a scientific approach which balances optimism with assessments of uncertainty to guide efficient deployment of the arts to benefit health. Further, we believe that the evidence base is still to be established as to whether the arts are as “necessary for our health and wellbeing as are exercise, good nutrition, and sleep”.

i Sajnani, N. & Fietje, N.

The Jameel Arts & Health Lab in collaboration with the WHO–Lancet Global Series on the health benefits of the arts.

Lancet. 2023; **402**: 1732-1734

ii Clift, S., Phillips, K. & Pritchard, S.

The need for robust critique of research on social and health impacts of the arts.

Cult Trends. 2021; **30**: 442-459

iii Grebosz-Haring, K., Thun-Hohenstein, L., Schuchter-Wiegand, A.K., Bathke, A.C. & Clift, S.

The need for robust critique of arts and health research: dance-movement therapy, girls, and depression.

Ann N Y Acad Sci. 2023; **1525**: 128-139

iv Kaasgaard, M., Rasmussen, D.B., Andreasson, K.H. et al.

Use of singing for lung health as an alternative training modality within pulmonary rehabilitation for COPD: a randomised controlled trial.

Eur Resp J. 2022; **59**:2101142

v Musgrave, G.

Music and wellbeing vs. musicians' wellbeing: examining the paradox of music-making positively impacting wellbeing, but musicians suffering from poor mental health.

Cult Trends. 2022; **32**: 280-295