

## Creativity has greater influence on wellbeing and happiness than work

By Riane Lumer, CNN - September 15, 2024

Engaging in creative activities can significantly boost well-being by providing meaningful spaces for expression and achievement, according to a new study.

Walking into my grandmother's house, I watch her hands move in a fast-weaving motion as stitches extend from her knitting needles. Beside her are layered stacks of knit blankets, scarves and ponchos stitched with carefully selected color schemes and patterns made of wool yarn. She donates these blankets to children's hospitals and foster homes. Her favorite pastime is creating. She is always crafting, whether it's knitting, coloring, scratch art or most recently, dabbling in gem art. These activities provide her satisfaction and purpose in ways more fulfilling than work.

She infused her love for arts and crafts into the rest of my family. My mom joined community theater groups when she became an empty nester and learned pour painting. My younger cousin photographs nature, and his father (my uncle) has a comedic podcast with voice actors. My twin brother and I sang in college — it kept us sane while balancing our heavy academic workloads.

We thought it was beneficial for our health, and we were right. Creating art reduces levels of cortisol, the body's stress hormone, past research has shown. "Engaging with arts and crafts is accessible and affordable. Options such as knitting and drawing require very few tools and can be engaging and creatively fulfilling activities," said Dr. Helen Keyes, cognitive psychologist and head of the school of psychology and sport science at Anglia Ruskin University, via email.

Now, a new study by Keyes and fellow researchers has found that engaging in creative activities can significantly boost well-being by providing meaningful spaces for expression and achievement. Although prior studies have shown that creating arts and crafts is therapeutic for people with mental health conditions, the general population has been understudied, according to the study, which published recently in Frontiers in Public Health. That's why they sampled members of the general population without diagnosed illnesses to see how arts and crafts might contribute to well-being and may reduce loneliness outcomes in everyday life.

The team used data from a major national survey in the UK between 2019-2020 to investigate how creative activities could impact life satisfaction, controlling for variables known to affect wellbeing such as gender, age group, health, employment status and deprivation. "We kept our analysis to arts and crafting at a broad level, rather than focusing on specific hobbies, as we know that people's preferences vary and they will find the craft or creative activity that works best for them," Keyes said.

More than 37% of survey respondents confirmed they had taken part in at least one craft activity over the last year. They were also asked about their employment status, their health, their sense of life being worth living, how frequently they feel lonely and their levels of sensed happiness, anxiety and life satisfaction.

Participants' reported happiness, life satisfaction and sense of lives being worthwhile were positively correlated to participating in arts and crafts, but arts and crafts were not associated with decreased anxiety or loneliness which requires further investigation. Additional study is needed to examine the social aspects of creative activities, researchers said. The researchers suggested that arts and crafts could improve public health.

Crafting provides an opportunity for a sense of achievement and expression through creation. "A sense of mastery is important for wellbeing, and there is inherently a sense of mastery associated with crafting and creating art; that is, people can see their progress and be proud of what they are producing," Keyes declared. A cheap option for indulging in creativity is coloring. Although some may perceive coloring as an activity for kids, "I love adult coloring books and encourage everyone to embrace their inner child," Clark said. "Coloring is an example of a mindfulness activity that has a multitude of health benefits. It can help foster social connection, improve concentration, and spur creativity."

And when you're creative, anything can happen. "Creativity has the power to foster resilience, restoration, and reconciliation," he said. "It is a cathartic antidote that can help provide a sense of meaning and purpose for humanity."