

Helping Parkinson's sufferers through ballet

Home > Impacts of arts and culture > Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture

This research was conducted by **Sara Houston and Ashley McGill** at the **University of Roehampton, UK**

Summary

This paper reports the results of a 12 week programme for people suffering from Parkinson's Disease run by English National Ballet. The researchers observed how people responded to the sessions, conducting tests for balance, stability, posture, and discovering more about their general mood and wellbeing. They found improvements in balance and stability (though not posture) as a result of the sessions, concluding that 'dancing may offer benefit to people with Parkinson's through its intellectual, artistic, social and physical aspects'.

The ENB programme focused on their production of Prokofiev's Romeo & Juliet

The programme comprised 12 weekly 90-minute sessions with a four-week break midway through the programme. It introduced participants to ballet and the workings of the ENB. In the sessions participants listened to music played live and respond through movement to various cues offered by the instructors. The 24 participants were all over 60 and suffering from Parkinson's, although they were sufficiently mobile to engage in the programme. There was an equal mix of men and women.

Participants were tested for a range of physiological abilities pre-, during and post-activity

Other data were recorded through interviews and filming the sessions. There were interesting observations that gentle dance movements increased people's flexibility. By the end of the programme participants seemed more confident about experimenting with movement, self-expression and exercise, and the researchers speculate that the increase in confidence made the biggest difference: allowing people to act on their nascent abilities and thereby derive benefits from that expression and experimentation. Many people reported a substantial improvement in their mood as a result of the social aspect of the sessions.

Something to keep in mind

The researchers were not able to stipulate the format of the art project – so it did not take place under traditional therapeutic or experimental conditions. The small sample also means that the results cannot be generalised.

Keywords

UK **balance** **experiment** **observation** **parkinsons** **ballet** **dance** **elderly**
stability

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