



# The Roles of Artistic Leisure Activities on Mental Health among Older Adults

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## Aging and mental health

People around the world are aging every day and the proportion of the population who is elderly continues to grow. The rate at which people are aging today is very rapid compared to past times due to increased lifespans, improved medicine, and aging baby boomers [1]. According to Lin and Brown [2], one third of older adults are single, and they might not have much interaction with their neighbors. Many older adults have been reported to suffer from loneliness and isolation [3], which often results in depression [4].

However, most older adults do not receive appropriate mental health services [5] and have a limited opportunity to receive treatment for mental health problems compared to those in other age groups [6]. Given the fact that mental health problems such as depression are prevalent among older adults and are increasing over time [6,7], those who do not receive treatment for depression in a timely manner may have difficulty sustaining their quality of life [5].



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### The importance of leisure activities

Participation in physical activities is an important factor to decrease depressive symptoms [8]. Engagement in such activities may relieve depression, as well as improve mental well-being [9]. Leisure activities, which share common characteristics with physical activities, are a main interest for many people and the amount of time spent engaged in leisure activities is increasingly growing [10]. As people have extra time to spend on their enjoyment, leisure activities have received more attention in many countries [8].

Participation in leisure activities plays a significant role on well-being, self-esteem and mental health in later life [11-14]. Repeated or sustained engagement in such activities is particularly associated with higher self-reported wellbeing over time. Additionally, participation in artistic leisure activities, such as making crafts, has been associated with an increase in subjective well-being [15]. Artistic leisure activities may also allow older adults to connect with others who enjoy similar activities [16-18]. Such artistic leisure activities may foster well-being and decrease mental health problems, such as depression, through these increased connections with others as well as increased self-confidence, a sense of purpose, life satisfaction and as a way to cope with stress [19,20].

### Knowledge gap and suggestions for future research

Previous literature regarding leisure activities has focused on Leisure-Time Physical Activities (LTPA) and has not as often addressed art-related leisure activities such as going to a concert, visiting a museum, or making arts and craft projects. Generally, researchers have concentrated on studying physical activities such as sports [21]. According to these findings, physical leisure activities can lead to improvement of health and sustained functional ability. However, to achieve successful aging, psychological health is as important as physical health [22]. In this context, artistic leisure activities may serve as alternative sources to improve psychological well-being. Older adults who cultivate their creative capabilities may be more resilient in the face of problems in later life. Particularly, given the effects of artistic activities on mental health [23,24], previous literature has not focused enough on the effects of artistic leisure activities on psychological wellbeing and mental health.

Most questionnaire research on leisure activities included questions on artistic leisure activities as well as physical activities. However, there was no clear separation between artistic leisure activities and other general leisure activities. This may be due to the lack of a clear definition for artistic leisure activities, and therefore, it is necessary to examine a clear definition and effect of artistic leisure activities. In other words, artistic leisure activities are a critical factor that contributes to successful aging and preventing depressive symptoms. Art therapy, which has close ties to artistic leisure activities, demonstrates that artistic activities can be an important intervention to reduce depression. Thus, we suggest that more attention should be given to artistic leisure activities to improve older adults' mental health problems by focusing on the art-related leisure activities rather than physical leisure activities, which have been covered in many literature reviews.

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