

Abstract

Delivering remote arts on prescription in a pandemic: An evaluation of its impact on subjective mood, wellbeing and loneliness

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The study evaluated the impact of the remote delivery of art-on-prescription for people in both primary and secondary care, as part of an Arts Council funded project run by Fresh Arts at Southmead Hospital, Bristol. Programmes ran between March 2020 to March 2021 and both the delivery and evaluation adapted to the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic by using postal, phone and online methods.

The evaluation used a pre-post design in addition to tracking mood and loneliness before and after each art workshop. At the start and end of programmes participants completed the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, WEMWBS (Tennant, et al., 2007), the Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool, CtELM (2019), and the Direct Measure of Loneliness, DMoL (ONS, 2018). Before and after each art workshop participants completed a 7-item questionnaire assessing state anxiety, happiness, energy and loneliness (Reissman et al., 2018; Wilhelm & Schoebi, 2007). 65 participants completed measures (55 females; mean age of 48), who were most commonly referred to improve wellbeing (96%), reduce stress (73%) and help manage chronic pain (38%).

There was a significant improvement in WEMWBS scores across the programmes ($F_{(1, 143)}=26.05, p<.001$). Self-reported loneliness decreased, but only significantly so for the DMoL ($F_{(97,1)}=3.91, p=.05$). Analysis of the immediate impact of art workshops showed a significant improvement on all dimensions (reduced anxiety and loneliness, and improved happiness and energy). Cross-level analyses showed that reductions in anxiety and loneliness while art-making predicted wellbeing change across the programmes ($F_{(94,1)}=4.26, p=.04$; $F_{(65,1)}=6.51, p=.01$); and reduced loneliness after art-making predicted reductions in DMoL scores ($F_{(47,1)}=3.97, p=.05$).

The outcomes of the evaluation suggest that the remote delivery of arts on prescription had a significant and positive impact on wellbeing and loneliness of participants. Challenges, limitations and implications of the study will be discussed.