

An exploration and evaluation of participatory community music to enhance wellbeing in people facing challenging circumstances

Fletcher A, Northumbria University (andrew.fletcher@northumbria.ac.uk), Hackett S

Background

This study incorporates organisations from the health, cultural and charity sectors to create participant-led music interventions for people with learning disabilities and/or mental health problems. The project is based around Chilli Studios, a community art/music studio for mental health service users, and the Ferndene Youth Music Project, a collaboration between an NHS inpatient unit for young people and the Sage Gateshead. The study has raised questions around individual perceptions of wellbeing, how to measure these, and how to evaluate the difference made to people's lives through cultural participation, specifically music.

Study

A realist evaluation of music participation and wellbeing has been conducted. Data collection has included an ethnographic component over a period of 18 months and interviews with project participants have been completed. Ten individuals from each of the two study sites were interviewed using a visual elicitation approach.

Results

Early results show that most participants have been able to identify personal experiences of 'wellbeing' in response to the project. This has been considered in terms of 'Context', 'Mechanism', and 'Outcome' in relation to their music participation. The evaluation has indicated that 'wellbeing' is defined very diversely by different people in different contexts and that consequently, the mechanisms which connect music participation to increased wellbeing also vary greatly.

Summary

This study highlights the need to develop opportunities and models of provision that look to increase accessibility for music participation to enhance wellbeing. These models should be flexible and based around cognitive mechanisms on an individual basis, with a view to facilitating more personal wellbeing outcomes contingent on context. The study's methodological approach has demonstrated that music participation has a positive influence on people's wellbeing, but that more research is needed around the meaning and measurement of wellbeing to maximise the impact of these and similar projects.

The creative turn in evidence for public health: community and arts based methodologies

Byrne E, Cardiff University (ByrneE@Cardiff.ac.uk), Dewis A, Elliott E, Saltus R, Williams G

The notion of 'evidence' in relation to health and wellbeing is challenged in this (paper, panel, workshop?) session as we discuss the possibilities that the creative arts hold for knowledge production and exchange. The *Representing Communities* project has been developing innovative arts-based methods to gather and exchange evidence relating to health and wellbeing between communities, policy makers and health service providers. In five distinct case study areas across the UK, the project seeks to challenge and augment existing representations of community as well as illuminating the everyday life, health and wellbeing of local residents. This is particularly important given the stigmatising nature of certain representational forms and the impact this has on health and wellbeing.

The study operates through a participatory framework whereby researchers, community members and artists co-produce pieces of 'evidence' (or 'intelligence') through the creative arts (such as storytelling, visual arts, music, drama and dance) in order to inform public policy making. These include aspects of community life not amenable to numeric forms of evaluation, such as forms of social cohesion or support, sources of personal resilience, experiences of welfare and the social dynamics of space.

In this session we problematize the reliance on dominant forms of evidence such as survey data and statistics. We invite debate on the contribution that community-based and arts-based forms of inquiry can make to public health, both in terms of their strengths and challenges. We also discuss policy responses to the arts as a form of evidence.

Using a biographical narrative methodology to explore infant feeding in areas of high social deprivation: A case study of two women who have 'never breastfed'

Gallagher J, Northumbria University, (justine.gallagher@northumbria.ac.uk)

Breastfeeding provides significant health benefits for mother and child. However, many mothers who live in Walker and Byker in Newcastle upon Tyne have 'never breastfed' their children. Research by Brown (2009) shows that breastfeeding is not the 'norm' in areas of disadvantage such as these.

To improve breastfeeding rates, it is important that we have an understanding of the lives of women who do not breastfeed their children to enable public health initiatives to be planned effectively. There is currently, a lack of research available with mothers who have 'never breastfed'.

This paper reports on results of research using a biographical narrative methodology that explores women's experiences of infant feeding in Walker and Byker. This methodology is revealed to be a very good way of understanding personal narratives surrounding infant feeding.

Using a case study approach, the experiences of two women who have 'never breastfed' are explored. The complexities surrounding infant feeding issues are discussed. This provides greater insight into the women's lives, such as their perceived identities of being 'good mothers'. The positive social support they receive from family members is also explored.

It is suggested that by using a biographical narrative methodology, researchers can help to uncover some of the ways women give meaning to their infant feeding practice. This research is important as it can positively impact the way in which breastfeeding is promoted in these areas in the future. This may ultimately increase breastfeeding rates in areas of disadvantage.

Reference

Brown, A. E., Raynor, P., Benton, D. and Lee, M.D. (2009). 'Indices of Multiple Deprivation predict breastfeeding duration in England and Wales.' *The European Journal of Public Health* 20(2): 231-235.