

# Arts-Based Interventions to Promote Mental Health Among Men: A Systematic Review

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## Introduction

- **Engagement in creative arts** has found to ↓ anxiety; ↑ personal growth, self-confidence & empowerment; and create meaning.
- Previous reviews have focused on groups like youths & older-aged adults - **none have focused on men.**
- Considering the potential for art-making to promote mental health & the **need to utilise gender-specific approaches** with men & mental health - this review is of importance.

### Research Questions

- **Is it effective?** - What are the mental health outcomes of engagement in art-making activities for adult men?
- **Is it acceptable?** - What are the processes & factors that shape the acceptability (and accessibility) of creative arts for men?

## Methods

- **Mixed-studies review** from 1993-2018 across five databases
- **Search terms:** mental health, wellbeing, suicide & terms relating to visual, literary, music, performance & digital arts.
- **Included if:** ≥25% male participants; ≥18yrs old; actively engaged in art-making; conducted in community setting; outcome relating to common mental health disorders and/or general mental wellbeing
- **Excluded if:** outcome primarily related to physical health, personality & cognitive disorders, learning disabilities; art-therapy, interventions with non-art components and/or those conducted in a clinical setting.
- A **second reviewer** screened **10% of articles** at each stage of screening. **MMAT** was used for **quality appraisal.**

## Results

### Connectedness

- ↑ social skills; acceptance & ↓ social isolation
- **Art-specific mechanisms** include physical synchrony, spatial closeness, & feedback on artwork.

- 50 Articles Included
- 64% Qual/30% Quant

### Self-Efficacy

- ↑ **achievement, skills & recognition;** overcoming challenges; making small manageable decisions.
- Recognise wider skills & sparked re-engagement with previous interests  
↑ **self-perception & competence.**

### Emotional Regulation

- Stress-relieving; ↑ positive emotions; absorption; distraction & emotional expression
- Valued **alternative form** of **communication**



### Meaning & Identity

- **Process:** self-discovery, re-interpret experiences → attach new meaning.
- **Product:** coping outlet → reflect on mental health journey since inception.
- **Meaningful routine, structure & roles.** Move past 'illness' identity → shape new identities.

### Dynamics of Engagement

- Non-competitive, inclusive & **friendly environment**
- **Flexible participation & no pressure** to discuss mental health.
- **Relatedness** among group (shared interests & experiences).
- **Encouraging & adaptable facilitator** that provided guidance & autonomy.

## Conclusion

- **Effective?** Art-based interventions show promise in promoting mental health for men through connectedness, emotional regulation, meaning-making, re-shaping identity & ↑ self-efficacy. However, more experimental designs are needed to explore these links using validated measures to draw definitive conclusions of evidence of effectiveness.
- **Acceptable?** A few studies reported on the factors that make arts-based interventions acceptable which related to the group, environment and facilitator. More research is needed to explore the factors that shape the acceptability of men's engagement art-based interventions with specific attention to gender-specific approaches.
- There is a need for a common way of reporting how arts-based interventions are designed & delivered, underpinned by a theoretical framework and/or theory of change.

This study is funded by the EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Co-Fund Action: Grant No. 754507.