

# The Arts and Individual Well-Being in Canada: *Connections between Cultural Activities and Health, Volunteering, Satisfaction with Life, and Other Social Indicators in 2010*

## Executive Summary



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*The Arts and Individual Well-Being in Canada*, the 39<sup>th</sup> report in the *Statistical Insights on the Arts* series, examines whether connections exist between Canadians' cultural activities and their personal well-being.

The data in the report show that there is a strong connection between cultural activities and eight indicators of health and well-being (such as health, mental health, volunteering, feeling stressed, and overall satisfaction with life). Cultural participants have significantly better results than non-participants for 101 out of 144 cross-tabulations (or 70%). Cultural participants have significantly worse results for only 10 of the cross-tabulations (or 7%). (Further details about the eight social indicators are provided at the end of this summary.)

Six cultural activities and three social indicators were selected for detailed statistical modeling. The key findings of the statistical models are that:

- Art gallery visits are associated with better health and higher volunteer rates.

### **Data source**

This *Statistical Insights on the Arts* report follows similar studies in the United States and Norway that showed a connection between cultural participation and health, well-being, volunteer rates, and other social indicators.

The data in this report are drawn from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey of 2010, an in-depth telephone survey of about 7,500 Canadians 15 years of age or older. "Cultural attendees" are defined as anyone who went at least once to the relevant cultural activity in 2010. This is a low threshold of cultural participation, as repeated (or deeply engaged) cultural experiences may generate stronger social connections. Also, many cultural activities do not have explicit social goals.

- Theatre attendance is associated with better health, volunteering, and strong satisfaction with life.
- Classical music attendance is associated with higher volunteer rates and strong satisfaction with life.
- Pop music attendance is associated with better health, volunteering, and strong satisfaction with life.
- Attendance at cultural festivals is associated with better health, volunteering, and strong satisfaction with life.
- Reading books is associated with better health, volunteering, and strong satisfaction with life.

The statistical models explore whether participation in these arts and culture activities have an association with social indicators above and beyond demographic information. That is, they examine whether cultural participants simply fit the demographic profile of healthy, socially-active citizens, or whether cultural participation might help explain aspects of health and well-being that are beyond demographic analysis.

While the statistical models provide evidence of a connection between cultural activities and well-being, some questions that might have an association with the three indicators of well-being (such as the influence of smoking or alcohol consumption on health) were not available in the General Social Survey. In addition, it is very difficult to provide irrefutable evidence of a cause and effect relationship between the variables in a statistical model in the absence of an experiment to directly measure the impacts of culture on personal well-being.

### ***Specific findings for each of the six cultural activities***

#### *Art gallery attendance*

The exploratory data analysis shows that art gallery attendance has a statistically significant connection with six of the eight social indicators. Compared with those who did not visit an art gallery in 2010, art gallery visitors:

- Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (60% vs. 47%).
- Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (67% vs. 58%).
- Are much more likely to volunteer (50% vs. 31%).
- Are less likely to feel trapped in a daily routine (30% vs. 37%).
- Are more likely to have done a favour for a neighbour in the past month (69% vs. 63%).
- Are slightly more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life (62% vs. 58%).

In a statistical model of health, art gallery visitors have a 35% greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-visitors, even accounting for other factors. Art gallery

visitors have an 89% greater likelihood of having volunteered in the past year than non-visitors, even after controlling for other factors. In a model of satisfaction with life, art gallery visitors were not shown to have a significantly greater likelihood of reporting very strong satisfaction with life than non-visitors, once other factors were accounted for in the model.

### *Theatre attendance*

Theatre attendance has a statistically significant connection with seven of the eight social indicators. Compared with those who did not attend a play in 2010, theatre attendees:

- Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (58% vs. 46%).
- Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (67% vs. 57%).
- Are much more likely to volunteer (50% vs. 28%).
- Are less likely to feel trapped in a daily routine (30% vs. 38%).
- Are more likely to know many or most of their neighbours (46% vs. 41%).
- Are more likely to have done a favour for a neighbour in the past month (70% vs. 61%).
- Are more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life (64% vs. 56%).

In a statistical model of health, theatre goers have a 32% greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-attendees, even after controlling for other factors. Theatre attendees are 2.29 times more likely than non-attendees to have volunteered in the past year, even accounting for other factors. In a model of satisfaction with life, theatre attendees have a 30% greater likelihood of reporting very strong satisfaction with life than non-attendees, once other factors were accounted for in the model.

### *Classical music attendance*

Classical music attendance has a statistically significant connection with six of the eight social indicators. Compared with those who did not attend a classical concert in 2010, those who did attend:

- Are more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (58% vs. 51%).
- Are more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (67% vs. 61%).
- Are much more likely to volunteer (55% vs. 35%).
- Are much less likely to feel trapped in a daily routine (26% vs. 36%).
- Are somewhat more likely to have done a favour for a neighbour in the past month (71% vs. 64%).
- Are more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life (68% vs. 59%).

In a statistical model of volunteering, classical music attendees have an 86% greater likelihood of having volunteered in the past year than non-attendees, even after controlling for other factors. Classical music attendees are 29% more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life than non-attendees, even accounting for other factors. In the health model, classical music attendees were not shown to have a significantly greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-attendees, once demographic factors were accounted for in the model.

### *Popular music attendance*

Pop music attendance has a statistically significant connection with seven of the eight social indicators. Compared with those who did not attend a pop concert in 2010, those who did attend:

- Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (58% vs. 48%).
- Are more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (66% vs. 59%).
- Are much more likely to volunteer (47% vs. 32%).
- Are less likely to feel trapped in a daily routine (31% vs. 36%).
- Are somewhat more likely to have done a favour for a neighbour in the past month (69% vs. 63%).
- Are slightly more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life (62% vs. 58%).

On the other hand, pop concert attendees are less likely than non-attendees to feel low levels of stress in their daily lives (35% vs. 40% feel not at all or not very stressed).

In a statistical model of health, pop concert attendees have a 23% greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-attendees, even after controlling for other factors. Pop music attendees are 64% more likely than non-attendees to have volunteered in the past year, even accounting for other factors. In a model of satisfaction with life, popular music attendees have an 18% greater likelihood of reporting very strong satisfaction with life than non-attendees, once other factors were accounted for in the model.

### *Attendance at cultural festivals*

Cultural festival attendance has a statistically significant connection with five of the eight social indicators. Compared with those who did not attend a cultural festival in 2010, those who did attend:

- Are more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (56% vs. 49%).
- Are slightly more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (64% vs. 60%).
- Are much more likely to volunteer (48% vs. 32%).

- Are more likely to have done a favour for a neighbour in the past month (70% vs. 62%).

On the other hand, cultural festival attendees are slightly less likely than non-attendees to feel low levels of stress in their daily lives (35% vs. 40% feel not at all or not very stressed).

In a statistical model of health, cultural festival attendees have a 14% greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-attendees, even after controlling for other factors. Festival attendees are twice as likely as non-attendees to have volunteered in the past year, even accounting for other factors. In a model of satisfaction with life, cultural festival attendees have a 25% greater likelihood of reporting very strong satisfaction with life than non-attendees, once other factors were accounted for in the model.

### *Book reading*

Book reading has a statistically significant connection with five of the eight social indicators. Compared with those who did not read a book in 2010, book readers:

- Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (54% vs. 44%).
- Are more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (63% vs. 56%).
- Are much more likely to volunteer (42% vs. 26%).
- Are less likely to feel trapped in a daily routine (33% vs. 39%).
- Are more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life (61% vs. 57%).

In a statistical model of health, book readers have a 28% greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-readers, even accounting for other factors. Book readers are 74% more likely than non-readers to have volunteered in the past year, even after controlling for other factors. In a model of satisfaction with life, book readers have a 15% greater likelihood of reporting very strong satisfaction with life than non-readers, once other factors were accounted for in the model.

### ***Eight social indicators***

The wording of the General Social Survey questions, as well as the researcher-created groupings of the eight social indicators, follows:

1. Self-reported health: "In general, would you say your health is: excellent? very good? good? fair? poor?" For this indicator, those responding excellent or very good were compared with those responding good, fair, or poor.
2. Self-reported mental health: "In general, would you say your mental health is: excellent? very good? good? fair? poor?" For this indicator, those responding excellent or very good were compared with those responding good, fair, or poor.

3. Volunteering: “In the past 12 months, did you do unpaid volunteer work for any organization?” Those who responded yes were compared with those who responded no.
4. Feeling trapped in a daily routine: “Do you feel trapped in a daily routine?” Those who responded yes were compared with those who responded no.
5. Stress in daily life: “Thinking about the amount of stress in your life, would you say that most days are: ... not at all stressful? ... not very stressful? ... a bit stressful? ... quite a bit stressful? ... extremely stressful?” For this indicator, those responding not at all or not very were compared with those responding a bit, quite a bit, or extremely.
6. Knowledge of neighbours: “Would you say that you know most, many, a few or none of the people in your neighbourhood?” For this indicator, those responding most or many were compared with those responding a few or none.
7. Favour for a neighbour: “In the past month, have you done a favour for a neighbour?” Those who responded yes were compared with those who responded no.
8. Self-reported satisfaction with life: “Using a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means “Very dissatisfied” and 10 means “Very satisfied”, how do you feel about your life as a whole right now?” For this indicator, those reporting very strong satisfaction with life (i.e., eight or higher) were compared with those reporting lower satisfaction with life (i.e., seven or less). The Canadian average is 7.6, so those reporting eight or higher have above-average satisfaction with life.

Previous reports in the *Statistical Insights on the Arts* series examined national and provincial data on arts and culture participation, as well as factors in arts attendance. The same 18 arts, culture, and heritage activities have been examined in each of the reports:

- Visiting a **public art gallery** or art museum (including attendance at special art exhibits)
- Visiting **museums other than public art galleries** or art museums
- Attending a **theatrical performance** such as drama, musical theatre, dinner theatre, comedy
- Attending a **popular musical performance** such as pop, rock, jazz, blues, folk, country and western
- Attending a symphonic or **classical music performance**
- Attending a **cultural or artistic festival** (such as film, fringe, dance, jazz, folk, rock, buskers or comedy)
- Attending a performance of **cultural or heritage music, theatre or dance** (e.g. Aboriginal Peoples, Chinese, Ukrainian)
- Attending any **other kind of cultural performance**
- Visiting an **historic site**
- Visiting a **zoo, aquarium, botanical garden, planetarium or observatory**
- Visiting a **conservation area or nature park**
- Reading a **newspaper**
- Reading a **magazine**

- Reading a **book**
- Going to a **movie** or drive-in
- Watching a **video**
- Listening to **downloaded music** on a computer, MP3 player, etc.
- Listening to **music on CDs**, cassette tapes, DVD audio discs, records, etc.