

Key findings of the research

Burnout: An outcome of a stressful life and work-related activities

Burnout is a serious condition that affects more and more people. In a study conducted in July 2020, Mental Health America (MHA) reported that 75% of workers experienced burnout, and 40% of those polled said it was a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic.

A pilot project of cultural prescriptions for burnout in Cluj-Napoca

Cultural Prescriptions is a type of initiative that encourages people who deal with different medical conditions to overcome their negative states and to improve their health and well-being by using arts. Various models of cultural prescriptions were successfully tested in other countries.

A Cultural Prescriptions-like pilot intervention programme was designed and tested in Cluj-Napoca. It offered free participation in a series of specially designed creative workshops to a group of people with burnout symptoms.

1. Documentation phase: A desk research on the relevance of the artistic interventions documented so far in the arts and health literature.

2. Co-design phase: The outcome of the collaboration between artists and researchers in public health was an intervention plan combining practical experiences and academic results highlighted in the first documentation phase.

3. Implementation phase: The intervention plan was the basis for the pilot project of Cultural Prescriptions for Burnout, which offered participation to 7 specially designed workshops to 11 participants with burnout symptoms.

Objectives

The intervention plan aimed to contribute to the development of imagination and emotional intelligence, stimulate the ability to express, reduce anxiety and cultivate self-esteem with the final purpose to help people overcome in time their burnout symptoms.

Creative workshops objectives:

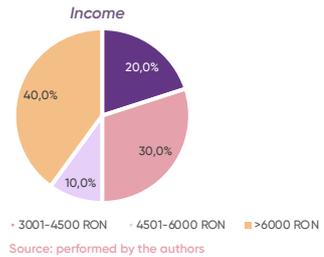
- O1: Assessment and awareness of the burnout states (session 1, 2 and 3)
- O2: Managing burnout states (session 4, 5 and 6)
- O3: Evaluation and prevention of burnout (session 7)

Participants: Profile

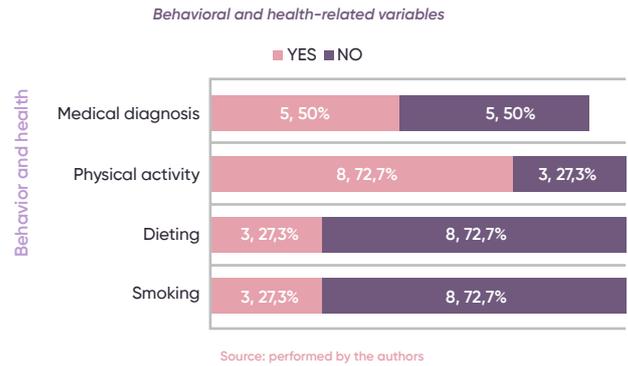
Initially, 12 participants were enrolled in the programme and 1 of them dropped out.

Gender: 8 female and 3 male participants were involved all throughout the programme.

Professional fields: Health System, Artistic, IT, Management, Education, Marketing or Unemployed (students)



Participants: Behavioral and health-related variables



Participants: Connection with the Arts

Only a few participants had connections with art before, one of them practiced it professionally (music), while others appreciated it and had attempts to practice some kind of art.

"I have not practiced art, but I am a big consumer of all types of art, I have never weighed the burnout with art." (Female, 31-35 years old, Project Manager)

At the end of the intervention, participants notice an improved relation with the arts, having an increased interest in the world of art and a direct experience of co-creation.

"I'm so glad I drew and in the end I realized that maybe I will continue with this thing, so yes, I discovered a few new things." (Male, 25-30 old, Test Analyst)

Participants: Expectations

"I would like to learn how to be more open and to express such things myself. I mean creative things"

"I would like to reduce the level of nervousness"

"to learn how to disconnect myself faster, to switch faster from professional to personal life"

"to recover my joyfulness and to learn again to do things for myself"

"to let myself feel"

"to get out of the comfort zone"

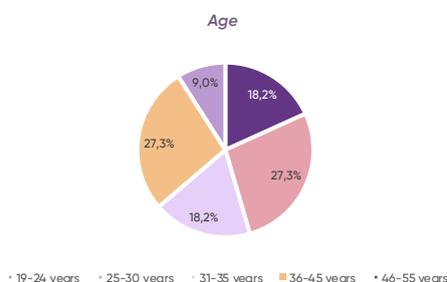
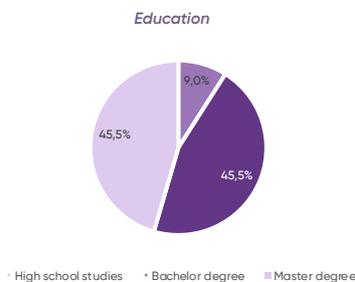
"to trust in myself"

"to calm down, to have more confidence in myself, as my confidence decreased during the pandemic"

4. Evaluation phase: Analyzing data gathered pre and post artistic intervention and highlighting the results

Participants states before the artistic intervention

All of the participants experienced high levels of burnout before the intervention (76-125) and they had more negative experiences than positive ones. Their burnout scores represented an important selection criteria for the participation within the pilot project.



• **Negative emotions** (anxiety, irritability, nervousness, depression): "I felt a lot of sadness, I didn't want to interact with anyone anymore, I practically couldn't find the small joys of life and I felt that it wasn't good, that I was not well." (Female, 36-45 years old, IT specialist)

• **Dysfunctional thoughts:** "...thoughts, I mean I was blocked in my mind, I was stuck in my mind for a very long time." (Female, 25-30 years old, Team Lead)

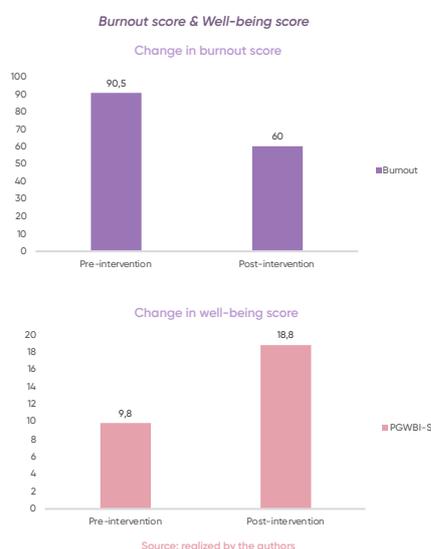
• **Physical symptoms:** "Anxiety, stress, actually physical, which manifests itself physically." (Female, 25-30 years old, Team Lead)

• **Behaviors** (impulsivity, procrastination): "...quite a few resignations out of impulsivity, dismissals also due to impulsivity, raising the tone at people without realizing that I am doing this, a very accentuated state of nervousness." (Female, 31-35 years old, Project Manager)

Participants states after the artistic intervention

After 7 weeks of intervention participants tended to experience a lower level of burnout, a higher level of well-being, a higher number of positive experiences, and a higher proportion of positive experiences compared to negative experiences.

For all the participants, the burnout level decreased from high level (76-125) to medium (51-75) or low level (35-50). 9 out of 11 people had medium burnout level after the intervention and 2 people had low burnout levels.



They experienced negative emotions and states, such as anxiety, depression, irritability before the intervention, but after the intervention they developed a more balanced perception about their problems, transitioning from a dysfunctional way of thinking and acting to a more functional one, from a fixed mindset to a more mindful one and from negative dysfunctional emotions to negative functional or even positive emotions and moods.

Healthy behaviours acquired by the participants include:

• **Social interactions:** "I have learned that I release the stress factor with others and I think that all the techniques that we practiced have changed the way I interact with other people." (Female, 31-35 years old, Project Manager)

• **Mindful approach:** "And regardless of the emotion, whether it is positive or not, I try to be present in that state and just let it be." (Female, 19-24 old, Freelancer Digital Marketing)

• **Useful behaviors:** "I think what has changed now is what I do when I feel "overwhelmed", I mean, when I actually feel the burnout, [...], now I try to do a certain thing maybe to improve my state or to get over it [...] to do something, I don't know, to stand up from the desk, to go get another coffee or tea, to go and caress the cat, "I don't know, anything", something to get me out of that thing." (Female, 25-30 years old, Team Lead)

Comparison between pre-intervention and post-intervention

Four out of the six measures have reached statistical significance and provided evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention in improving well-being. There was a significant difference between:

• pre-intervention burnout score (M = 90.5, SD = 6.3) and post-intervention burnout score (M = 60.0, SD = 11.5); $t(10) = -6.7, p < .000$ – the mean burnout score was reduced by over 30 points after the intervention;

• pre-intervention PGWBI-S score (M = 9.82, SD = 3.8) and post-intervention PGWBI-S score (M = 18.8, SD = 4.0); $t(10) = 7.1, p < .000$ – the mean well-being score nearly doubled after the intervention;

• pre-intervention SPANE-P score (M = 16.0, SD = 4.1) and post-intervention SPANE-P score (M = 22.9, SD = 3.9); $t(10) = 7.1, p < .000$ – the positive experiences score increased by almost 7 points;

• pre-intervention SPANE-B score (M = 3.9, SD = 5.5) and post-intervention SPANE-B score (M = 0.5, SD = 2.1); $t(10) = 2.6, p < .05$ – the SPANE-B score increased by over 4 points, which translates into a higher proportion of positive experiences.

Overall, burnout scores have decreased, and it seems that the art intervention helped participants manage their burnout-related emotions. Moreover, well-being scores nearly doubled after the intervention, which means that participants started to feel better at the end of the programme.

5. Scaling the initiative: The results of the study will be used as an argument for scaling up this type of initiatives and to recognize the potential of art to contribute to human resilience and well-being.

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Research objective

The study aimed to assess the impact and the contribution of arts in overcoming the degree of burnout of participants in a specially designed cultural prescriptions pilot project.

Research methodology

Research type: Quantitative and qualitative data analysis pre and post artistic intervention

Data collection: September–November 2020

Sample size: 11 participants enrolled in the artistic intervention

Research instruments:

The Burnout Syndrome Scale (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

The Psychological General Well-Being Index (short version) (PGWBI-S) (Grossi et al., 2006)

The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) (Diener et al., 2010)

Research limitations and future directions:

To use a control group with the same characteristics as people included in this study and to measure the level of burnout for this group of people who are not participating in a similar project.

To use more specific inclusion and exclusion criteria within the programme in order to accurately work with a specific issue, particularly burnout, and not overlap with other issues such as anxiety.

About the research

This research was carried out by the Cluj Cultural Centre (RO) within the Art&Well-being Project. The project explores the potential of the arts to enhance individual and community well-being and is co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

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