

Creative work has health advantages, study shows

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Employees who have more control over their daily activities and do challenging work they enjoy are likely to be in better health, according to a new study from The University of Texas at Austin published in this month's *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*.

"The most important finding is that creative activity helps people stay healthy," said lead author John Mirowsky, a sociology professor with the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin.

"Creative activity is non-routine, enjoyable and provides opportunity for learning and for solving problems. People who do that kind of work, whether paid or not, feel healthier and have fewer physical problems."

Although people who work do give up some control over their daily activities, the study found that being employed leads to better health generally, regardless of the amount of creativity required in their work.

"One thing that surprised us was that the daily activities of employed persons are more creative than those of non-employed persons of the same sex, age and level of education," Mirowsky said.

The study was composed of 2,592 adults who responded to a 1995 national telephone survey that was followed up in 1998. The survey addressed general health and physical functioning, as well as how people spent their daily time on and whether their work, even if unpaid, gave them a chance to learn new things or do things they enjoy.

"The health advantage of being somewhat above average in creative work (in the 60th percentile) versus being somewhat below average (in the 40th percentile) is equal to being 6.7 years younger," Mirowsky said.

It is also equal to having two more years of education or 15 times greater household income, he added.

Although the authors didn't examine specific job positions that may confer this health advantage, professions considered not to involve a creative environment included those in which people work in assembly lines. Jobs that are high-status, with managerial authority, or that require complex work with data, generally provide more access to creative work, Mirowsky said.

"People with a wide variety of jobs manage to find ways to make them creative," Mirowsky said. "And, people with higher levels of education tend to have more creative activities in their lives, paid or not."

Source: University of Texas at Austin

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