

India's vast Ganges gathering 'good for health', study says

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India's Kumbh Mela, the world's biggest religious festival which sees up to 100 million people flock to take a bath in the river Ganges, is good for pilgrims' health, according to a new study.

Despite facing cold weather, endless noise, poor food and the risk of disease, Hindu devotees who attend such events report higher levels of mental and physical well-being, said the study by researchers in India and Britain.

"While some might indeed fall ill and feel worse, for most the Mela gathering is good for their health," said the research entitled "Understanding the Pilgrim Experience".

The 55-day Kumbh Mela in Allahabad in [northern India](#), which takes place every 12 years, began on Monday where authorities said eight million people jostled for space to take a dip in the sacred waters which are said to cleanse sins.

Smaller melas take place every year in India.

[Social scientists](#) from four British and five Indian universities concluded that the shared group experience of enduring [hardships](#) and sharing the same activities outweighed any [physical discomfort](#).

"The experience of being part of a tightly-knit group of Hindu pilgrims, and the sense of support one gets from one's fellow pilgrims, enhances

one's sense of being part of the community more generally," it said.

The study, published in the scientific journal [Plos One](#), involved two surveys in 2010 and 2011 involving 416 pilgrims and a sample of 127 people who had not attended a mela.

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