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Mental Health Arts Festival as a tool for mental health promotion

Karolina Zakarauskaite

K Zakarauskaite¹, M Jakubauskiene²

¹The Mental Health Arts Festival, Vilnius, Lithuania

²Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Contact: karolina.zakarauskaite@gmail.com

Background of the problem: 1 in 4 people experience mental health problems each year, and that number is only growing. Stigma and

discrimination of mental health are widespread and affect the quality of life at the individual and societal level. The WHO identifies mental health arts festivals as an effective way to reduce stigma and improve mental health.

Description of the problem: We are not comfortable talking about mental health difficulties and the care we need. Consequently, individuals often withhold personal experiences to shield themselves from potential bias and harsh judgement.

Methodology: The Mental Health Arts Festival (MHAF) Bonds (<https://www.rysiaifest.lt/>, <https://www.facebook.com/Rysiaifest>) seeks to contribute to the human rights based mental health knowledge creation across the partner organisations, involved communities and audiences, as well as contribute to local creation of artworks on the topic of mental health in open, accessible, safe space where every voice matters. The biannual MHAF brings together recognised artists, arts institutions, scientists, policy makers and communities of people with mental health issues (over 80 events, attracting about 4,500 spectators) for group exhibition, films, contemporary dance and live performances, literary readings, open microphones, followed by discussions and workshops. Qualitative study methodology is applied to assess the potential impacts of the MHAF.

Lessons:

- Visual identity that seeks to challenge existing stigmatising views.
- The festival has become the production or premier place of new artworks on the topics of mental health, spanning addiction, war-related trauma, transgenerational trauma, neurodiversity.

Key messages:

- Mental health arts festivals promote mental health literacy and reduce negative attitudes towards health-seeking behaviour.
- Art festivals should be an integral part of national programs to address stigma and promote mental health and well-being.