

## Social support and the accessibility to and regular participation in various types of activities

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### Background

The level of social support is an important factor for mental wellbeing. Beyond socioeconomic factors, it is interesting to investigate how access to various facilities, in combination with the level of participation in activities, influence the level of social support experienced. Such knowledge is valuable to local administrations and politicians wishing to create communities that promote good mental health.

### Methods

A cross-sectional questionnaire survey was carried out in 2015 in three Norwegian counties. 22702 adults were invited to take part. The response rate was 42.7%. Collected data were merged with socioeconomic variables from central registers. Social support was found using the Oslo 3-item scale. Linear regression was used to assess the strength of association between level of social support as a dependent variable, and variables of participation and accessibility to facilities in the local community, adjusting for age, gender, education and income.

### Results

The Pearson correlation coefficient between social support and participation in activities is moderate to strong at 0.33. The linear regression yielded a significant association between social support and participation in activities ( $p < 0.01$ ), with standardised beta 0.27. The adjusted total explained variance was 0.142. Good access to public transport, easy access to nature, ease of movement in the local community and easy access to information about public services were all significant in the model at the 5% level. Access to information had the strongest association with a standardised beta of 0.12 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

### Conclusions

Local politicians and administrations concerned with creating communities that promote good mental health through good social support should pay attention to measures that stimulate to regular participation in organised and unorganised activities. The findings in this study show a clear association between good social support and easy access to information about public services.

### Key messages:

- To strengthen the social support experienced by people, it is important to focus on local factors that encourage participation in various activities, including the accessibility to local facilities.
- Politicians and planners need to plan for both information about and access to public facilities and services.