Exploring the impact that dance teachers have on the mental heath and wellbeing of undergradaute dance students

Sarah Martin

I chose to study BSC (Hons) Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Well-being as I have seen first-hand the positive impact mental health professionals can have on, not only the young person's life, but those around them life, and I want to be able to have this impact. By promoting and supporting positive mental health and well-being in childhood, it provides the foundations for a happy and healthy adulthood. My dissertation explores the impact that dance teachers have on their dancer's mental health and well-being, specifically with undergraduate dancers. This stems from my twin sister studying dance at undergraduate level, and I saw first-hand the impact this has had on her mental health and well-being. I feel that research into dancers' mental health and well-being can highlight the daily challenges that they face in, not only their training, but also career, as often dancers are seen as 'perfect'.

Abstract

Introduction: A wealth of research highlights the vulnerability that dancers training professionally face, regarding their MH and well-being. Literature suggests several factors within the dance environment which can impact a dancers MH and well-being, but emphasize the teacher as being the most important and influential factor. Although research explores the impact a teacher has on a student's MH and well-being, little research exists of understanding this impact within the educational dance environment and the arts in general.

Aim: To understand the impact that dance teachers have on an undergraduate dance student's mental health and well-being.

Methods: A qualitative study recruited participants using a convenience sampling strategy which recruited five participants. All participants completed a virtual interview via Microsoft Teams, lasting up to one hour, where they were asked ten open-ended questions and subsequent follow-up questions. The interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed before being analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Three key themes emerged from analysis of the research results, which help contribute towards understanding the ways a dance teacher can impact their students MH and well-being. The three key themes synthesised are: favouritism, the dance industry and MH within dance.

Conclusions: Greater career support and development is essential for dance teachers, to help them create an educational dance environment which promotes positive MH and well-being for students. Additionally further support is needed for dancers throughout their training and once they are professional, due to the unique and challenging domain of the performing arts. Further research is needed to explore why dance teachers show favouritism and the impact it has on their dance students.

Background

The following review of the literature was conducted using key search terms for a systematic literature search. An advanced search using key terms and boolean operators was conducted for a more focused literature retrieval.

Mental health

The dominant definition of MH (Galderisi et al., 2015; Galderisi et al., 2017; Palumbo and Galderisi, 2020; Richter and Dixon, 2022) comes from the WHO (2022) who explain it to be a state of well-being in which individuals can cope with the normal stressors of life. MH can be seen as an equilibrium (Galderisi et al., 2015; Galderisi et al., 2022), with MH disorders affecting cognitive processes (Muller, 2020; Richter and Dixon, 2022). This negatively impacts the development of children and adolescents having a detrimental impact during adulthood (Kowalenko and Culjak, 2018; WHO, 2018; Naylor et al., 2016). Well-being is a broad concept which encompasses one's self-esteem, worthiness, resilience, and quality of life (Huppert, 2017; Ruggeri et al., 2020; Simons and Baldwin, 2021). Hernandez-Torrano et al. (2020) explains that MH and well-being are connected, as your well-being effects your MH and vice-versa.

In recent years, the number of young people experiencing MH issues has significantly increased (Jurewicz, 2015; Wright et al., 2020; Santomauro, 2021; Westberg et al., 2022), as in 2017 one-in-ten seventeen-to-nineteen years old were diagnosed with a MH problem compared to one-in-six in 2020 (Newlove-Delgado et al., 2022). Therefore, Häggström-Westberg et al. (2022) explains that MH in this age group is becoming a priority.

Physical activity

PA describes any movement of the muscles which require energy expenditure and produces healthy benefits (WHO, 2010; Thivel et al., 2018; Piggin, 2020; Stennett, DeSouza and Norris, 2020). This definition forms the basis of many health policies internationally (WHO, 2018; UK Chief Medical Officers, 2019) and is used in research (Piggin, 2020; Haseler, Crooke and Haseler, 2019). Piggin (2020) explains there has not been published critique of this dominant definition. The PA's most participated in are football, swimming, running and dancing (DeVos, DuToit and Coetzee, 2016; Posadzki et al., 2020), but Miller et al. (2016) explain taking part in any PA is beneficial. There is a wealth of research highlighting the positive effect PA has on an individual's health (Elmagd, 2016; Warburton and Bredin, 2017; Mandolesi et al., 2018; Piercy et al., 2018; Posadzki et al., 2020), which is essential for the healthy growth and development of children and adolescents (Bidzan-Bluma and Lipowska, 2018; Veldman, Paw and Altenburg, 2021). Much of this research highlights PA as being an effective therapy for improving MH problems (Beier et al. 2014; Bielak et al. 2014; Tian et al. 2014; Teychenne et al., 2020), including depression (Murri et al., 2018), anxiety (Aylett, Small and Bower, 2018), self-esteem (Sani et al., 2016) and resilience (Lancaster and Callaghan, 2022). This is because PA increases the brain's release of endorphins (Hyvonen et al., 2020; Kabir, 2021), which subsequently blocks pain cells and returns the body to the individuals most desirable state (Brouns and Shewry, 2022; Moreno and Ramalheira, 2022; Alkureishi, 2022). Systematic control trials by Schuch et al. (2016) and Ekkekakis (2015) support this, showing that, when compared with traditional treatments such as psychological interventions and medication, PA had a significant antidepressant effect on individuals with depression. Krogh et al's. (2017) systematic reviews highlight that PA interventions have resulted in a 22% higher likelihood of remission from depression than usual treatments. Despite the clear benefits exercise has on MH, there is an 18% drop out rate amongst people with MH issues (Stubbs et al., 2016).

Guidelines

Due to the clear benefit exercise has on an individual's health, international guidelines by the WHO (2022) provide recommendations for different life stages on how much PA is required for good health. For five-to-seventeen-year-olds the recommendation is thirty minutes of daily exercise, but adults aged over eighteen should do sixty minutes of daily exercise (WHO, 2018). These guidelines were adopted with the aim to reduce global levels of physical inactivity in adults by fifteen percent by 2030 (Bull et al., 2020), as recent global research shows that three-quarters of adolescents (Guthold et al., 2020) and one-quarter of adults (Guthold et al., 2018) do not achieve their recommended daily exercise. However, the COVID-19 lockdown has had a detrimental impact on people's daily exercise routine (Kaur et al., 2020; Dor-Haim et al., 2021; Theis et al., 2021). This is because all organised sport, such as dance classes, were cancelled, whilst limited outdoor exercise was allowed, resulting in harmful consequences (Mann et al., 2020; Garcia-Garcia et al., 2020; Grix et al., 2022). Research by Watson et al. (2021; 2022) and Raimondi et al., (2022) shows that early COVID-19 sports restrictions were associated with adolescents declining MH. Similarly, after returning to sporting activities following the lockdown there were significant improvements in MH and well-being. Despite this, Sluijs et al. (2021) explains that, even before the COVID-19 lockdown, eighty percent of adolescents are insufficiently active, and instead dedicate this time to technology. Many researchers agree with this, highlighting that despite the long-standing public knowledge of the benefits of regular exercise (O'Donovan and Shave, 2007), few adolescents are active enough to optimise these health outcomes (Guthold et al., 2020; Duffey et al., 2021; Sluijs et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021).

National Curriculum

To meet these PA guidelines, PE is a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum at all ages (House of Commons, 2019). As part of this, in 2019 the School Sport and Physical Activity Plan was published, which set an ambition that all young people should access at least sixty minutes of PA a day, with thirty-minutes being at school and thirty-minutes being outside of school (DfE, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Health and Social Care, 2019). This followed a survey by Sport England highlighting that nearly one-third of young people are currently doing fewer than thirty minutes of exercise a day (Sport England, 2022).

Dance is a compulsory PE activity within the national curriculum, at Key Stages one, two and three and can be chosen at GCSE, A-Level and undergraduate level (DfE, 2013), as Sanderson (1996) describes PE as the gateway to dance in schools. Tao et al. (2022) agrees with this, saying that dance offers a viable PA alternative to traditional PE within education. Teaching dance in schools not only enables young people to gain artistic skills, but also develops team working, confidence, verbal and non-verbal skills (Arts Council England, 2020; RAD, 2022), which are transferable life skills (Vincent, Timmons and Mulholland, 2020). Despite this, Lamond (2010) argues that the role of dance within the British education system is not consistent, due to the lack of PE curriculum time dedicated to dance (Mattsson and Luvndvall, 2015). Research by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) (AQA, 2022) shows over the past fifteen years, there has been a thirty-eight-percent decrease in the number of pupils taking GCSE dance. Semi-structured interviews by Vincent, Timmons and Mulholland (2020) found this was due to the challenges teachers faced in delivering a quality dance education, examples being time pressure and accountability (Moore, 2012; Engdahl, Lundvall and Barker, 2021). They recommend that future qualitative research into dance education

should be conducted to gather student views, to give a wider perspective of dance education, with particular focus on the quality of the provision (Vincent, Timmons and Mulholland, 2020).

The Transforming Children's and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2017) places schools and collages at the centre of plans to immerse MH within education. This is because a wealth of research highlights the essential role educational settings play in the MH and well-being of children and adolescents (WHO, 2015; House of Commons, 2017; Jessiman et al., 2022; Norwich et al., 2022). As a result of this, Public Health England and the DfE (2021) published 'A whole school or college approach to promoting children and young people's mental health and well-being'. It sets out eight principles which help contribute towards promoting and protecting young people's MH and well-being.

Dance

Throughout history, dance has consistently been used as a tool for healing, like that of therapies and pharmacology used today (Stewart and Irons, 2018; Sheppard and Broughton, 2020). In recent years, particularly in Western Society, the connection between performing arts and health has diminished, there is growing interest to apply a modern-day lens to understand the contribution performing arts makes to MH and well-being (Sheppard and Broughton, 2020). Current research agrees with this, as they suggest performing arts and health are more closely linked than policymakers and health professionals think (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013; Crawford, et al., 2015; Dawson, 2013).

A wealth of research has demonstrated the benefits of dance on physical aspects of health and fitness, including flexibility and balance (Yin et al., 2019; Douka et al., 2019; Khaldir, Tang

and Purnamasarl, 2020), stamina (Clifford et al., 2022; Hwang and Braun, 2017) and cardiovascular health (Merom, Ding and Stamatakis, 2016; Douka et al., 2019). Despite this, Nguyen (2014) highlights that there is little research on the psychological and emotional benefits of dancing. Fancourt (2017) explains that dance itself can enhance well-being, as like any PA, dancing releases endorphins which create a general sense of well-being (Karkou, Oliver and Lycouris, 2017; Hyvonen et al., 2019). Additionally, dancing is an instrument of self-expression and a tool for self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-reflection (Schwender et al., 2018; Basso, Satyal and Rugh, 2021). Krantz (2012) explains this is due to the fact dance regularly requires the application of emotions in performing, choreographing and improvisation, which brings an awareness to conscious and unconscious emotions. Research by Kordahi and Hassmen (2022) support this, with emotional intelligence questionnaires highlighting dancers as having a higher emotional intelligence than non-dancers.

Nonetheless, it is well documented that dancing increases the risk for, and is strongly associated with, MH problems (VanWinden et al., 2020; Sundgot-Borgen, 2021; Mathisen et al., 2022). This is particularly felt amongst students training professionally in dance, as Gregory and Interiano-Shiverdecker, (2021) highlight there is a higher prevalence of MH problems amongst students training professionally in dance than in the general population. Research by Mathisen et al., (2022) supports this, showing that around 54% of dance students experience at least one MH issue during their time training. Desai (2018) explains that by identifying the areas of the dance environment which contribute to a dancer's MH, further research can be conducted to explore the influence of these areas on dancers.

Dance teachers

Undergraduate dance training is both a protective (Zhang et al., 2021) and risk factor (Mathisen et al., 2022) for MH. Literature agrees with this, highlighting that dancers are at higher risk of developing MH issues, due a range of factors within the dance environment and dance culture (Laws, 2005; Grove, Main and Sharp, 2013; Wanke et al., 2015; Ducci, 2019; Hopper et al., 2020; Kalyva et al., 2021).

Dantas et al. (2018) concludes that one most common factors that influence a dancer's MH is their teachers. A wealth of research supports this, showing that because dance teachers are a central figure within the dance environment, their impact on a dancer's MH and well-being cannot be underestimated (VanRossum, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2018; Huang, 2022). Within dance training, VanRossum (2001) highlights that the role of the dance teacher is more important than that of the dancers' parents. Additionally, Wulff (2008) highlights the hierarchy that exists in Western dance culture, with teachers being at the top of hierarchy, and as a result the actions and behaviours of dance teachers have a significant impact on dancer's MH and well-being (Belvins et al., 2020). Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003) and Watkins (2007) argue that despite dance teachers being central in educational dance environments, they receive little scholarly attention. Ophir (2016) agrees with this, stating that literature neglects dance teachers and their impact. Research by VanRossum (2004) draws attention to the impact a dance teacher can have on a dancer's MH. Using the dance-adapted Leadership Scale for Sport for retired professional dancers, they investigated the different dimensions to a dance teachers' behaviour. One-third of the dancers said that their teachers critical and cruel comments damaged their self-esteem. However, half of the dancers explained that the teacher had inspired them with their high standards and helped them to exceed personal limits. VanRossum (2004) highlights that

the impact a dancer teacher has on a dancer is extremely personal and can provoke various contradictory feelings.

Research by Hancox et al. (2017) examines the teacher-created social environment and how it effects a dancer during class. Dancers work with teachers for many hours, making it easy for their thoughts to influenced by the attitude, words and behaviours of their teachers. The results found dance teachers can evoke both positive and negative emotions. On one hand, when dance teachers create a caring, positive environment within the class, this promotes a dancer's confidence and reediness for learning. On the other hand, dancers who perceive their teachers to display controlling and stressful behaviours whilst also comparing dancers to others are more likely to experience negative emotions. Kolokythas et al. (2022) agrees with this, explaining that 17–19-year-olds training professionally in dance train for up to seven hours a day, seven days a week, and therefore the environment around them has a significant impact on their MH and well-being. Similarly, the DfE's (2010) White Paper highlights teachers as being the most influential on children. Research supports this, highlighting that children's interactions with their teachers within the classroom influence children's current and long-term, social and emotional development (Hosan and Hoglund, 2017; Glazzard and Rose, 2019; Sun, 2021; Goldberg and Iruka, 2023). Akhter et al. (2019) agrees with this, highlighting that students spend an average of six hours a day at school, teachers therefore have a significant impact on children.

Many researchers address that ED's are represented within dance literature in general (Hincapie and Cassidy, 2010; Clark et al., 2014; Anshel, 2019; Åkesdotter et al., 2020; Sundgot-Borgen, 2021; Kalyva et al., 2021; Droia and Numer, 2022). Qualitative research by Francisco, Alarcao, and Narciso (2012) supports this, showing pressure for a thin body within

dance is emphasised by the dance schools, highlighting the important role dance teachers can play in impacting dancers body image, either positively or negatively. A wealth of this research applies to ballet training, as Clark et al. (2014) states that most of the research for ballet dancers is related to ED's. Researchers explain that this is because ballet teachers see a straight body and long limbs as essential characteristics for dancers (Reel et al., 2005; Eufrasio et al., 2021; Danis et al., 2016; Ohashi et al., 2022; Nascimento, 2021). Despite this, there is emerging research showing that ballet is becoming more accepting of all body types (Danis et al., 2016; Villa, 2017). Villa (2017) draws attention to the fact that these are only small steps. Kalyva et al. (2021) says there is limited research into other dance styles, and more research is needed for dancers of multiple genres. Questionnaires conducted by Santos et al. (2022) further adds to this, stating that adolescents attending art schools, particularly dance schools, experience body-related issues to a greater intensity because their body is their work instrument. Particularly, two-thirds of adolescent participants showed severe body-related symptoms. Santos et al. (2022) explains this research highlights that dance schools are ideal places to promote MH and invest in preventative measures. However, the participants in this research all had similar characteristics, and therefore weakens the conclusions of the research.

Rational

The research question explores undergraduate dancer's experiences and how their dance teachers impact their MH and well-being, aiming to draw attention to the importance of positive teacher-pupil relationships within professional dance training. Kalyva et al. (2021) notes this is important in benefitting a dancer's well-being. Despite the field gaining some momentum (Vella-burrows et al., 2017), understanding the contribution the dance environment makes to well-being is not well understood (Wakeling, 2019). Ducci (2019) agrees with this, stating that although MH awareness has become prominent within recent years, the dance world is behind in terms of MH awareness, just as it is with race and gender. Mansfield et al.

(2018) explains that the amount and quality of published evidence on the MH of dancers is low, highlighting a need for more well-designed studies. Kim (2022) adds to this, stating that future research is needed to explore the impact dance mentors have on the career of a professional dancer. This research aims to explore the impact that dance teachers have on an undergraduate dancer's MH and well-being. By increasing research with professional dance students, it could provide councillors with a deeper awareness of the populations needs (Gregory and Interiano-Shiverdecker, 2021).

Method

Design

A qualitative approach was adopted, as the questions seek an in-depth exploration of personal experiences (Nassaji, 2020), by answering the how and why questions (Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger, 2020). Within this qualitative approach semi-structured interviews were used. The nature of qualitative research allows for flexibility in the interview (Zeigle and Shackelford, 2020), such as follow-up questions to be asked for points the researcher or participant consider to be important (Dejonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). This was the most appropriate method to answer the research question as Knowles and Cole (2008) explain conclusions drawn from qualitative research in the arts allows for the creation of new techniques and empowers performers. VanWinden et al. (2020) further explains that within dance literature, quantitative research is hard to compare, due to a broad range of MH problems.

Although qualitative research methods are prominent within MH research (Baud, O'Brien and Mitchell, 2019); they are criticised as being small-scale, biased and lacking rigour (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Despite this criticism, research by Morgan et al. (2002) found that within the first six interviews most of the information in the data set was produced, and by the twentieth interview, little new information was produced. Semi-structured interviews are criticised as the researcher could ask leading questions based-off participants responses (Alsaawi, 2010) which is not possible in other methods such as questionnaires (Frey 2018). To overcome this the researcher has addressed interviewer bias in the reflective position section. However, there is bias in all research methods, making it hard to eliminate (Smith and Nobel, 2014).

Participants

In qualitative research, participants are chosen who can best inform the research question and enhance understanding (Sargeant, 2012). When choosing participants the researcher considered sample size, research goal and timescale (Mwita, 2022). The research involved five undergraduate dance students, enabling a range of experiences to be collected.

There were two factors in the inclusion criteria. First, participants had to be completing their undergraduate dance training at the college, as they are then receiving training from dance teachers five days a week. They must also be in their third and final year of undergraduate training, as they have a lived experience of working with a range of dance teachers.

There were two criteria that excluded dancers from the study. The first is dancers who are not dancing for any reason, as this may have impacted their relationship with their teacher and therefore not present an accurate description. Secondly, dancers who are in their first or second year of the degree, or at any level on a diploma course.

When recruiting participants for the research a convenience sampling strategy was used, which is a non-probability method where participants are drawn from a source convenient to the researcher (Andreade, 2021). Kriska, Sass and Fulcomer (2013) highlights convenience sampling is particularly useful in undergraduate health research, as Stratton (2021) explains it is not as time consuming or as costly as other sampling strategies. However, convenience sampling it criticised for its lack of generalisability, due to the small sample size (Jager, Putnick and Bornstien, 2017; Murad et al., 2018). However, Kukull and Ganguli (2012) and Palinkas et al. (2015) note that all sampling strategies in qualitative research lack generalisability, as by the very nature the sample size it is too small to provide more in-depth data.

Materials

To collect data semi-structured interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, due to the ease of conducting the interviews at home and being able to record them. Whilst arranging the interviews the researcher and participant used their student email addresses. Before beginning the interview, the researcher tested the audio and internet connection to minimise any communication difficulties. Whilst conducting the interview the researcher was alone in a private space, to ensure confidentiality of the participant. Participants were also encouraged to complete the interview in a private space, to ensure they could talk freely without being overheard. The audio and video from the interviews were recorded over Microsoft Teams, to allow the interviews to be transcribed.

Procedure

To recruit participants the researcher selected a college in the North-West that provides undergraduate dance training. The head of dance at the college was contacted via the email on the prospectus, and permission was granted to recruit participants. The head of dance acts a gatekeeper, which McFadyen and Rankin (2016) explain is important to not only reduce researcher bias but protect the participants from potential harm.

A promotional poster and supporting announcement were announced to the third-year students, which briefly outlined what was expected of participants. Students were given two weeks from the initial announcement was put up to contact the researcher, via email, expressing an interest to take part, upon which they were provided with a participant information sheet and consent form.

The five semi-structured interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes. The undergraduate researcher decided to conduct a pilot interview in preparation, allowing for change and

reflection to enhance the validity of the research. Once the interview began on Microsoft Teams the researcher followed the interview schedule, including the main questions and sub-questions to prompt for more detailed answers.

At the end of the interview participants were asked if they had any further questions and how they were feeling. Participants were also reminded of, and if needed sign-posted to, the services on the participant information sheet. After the interview the recordings were uploaded onto Edge Hill University OneDrive, with only the researcher and their supervisor able to access them, for transcription.

Data analysis

When analysing data, the researcher becomes responsible for making judgements, creating themes and presenting the data (Starks and Trinidad, 2007), it is therefore important that the researcher is clear about how to complete this (Braun and Clarke, 2022), as if not the research loses credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020) highlight that due to the vast and diverse nature of qualitative research, a range of data analysis methods exist. For undergraduate researchers, thematic analysis is the best method to use (Clarke and Braun, 2017), as it is simpler to conduct than other analysis methods (Javadi and Zarea, 2016), and by following a six-step method as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006). Kiger and Varpio (2020) explain that thematic analytical is the main method of analysing qualitative data, as it is trustworthy in helping to understand experiences, behaviours and thoughts across a data set.

Following the first step of thematic analysis, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To do this, the researcher initially transcribed the interviews, creating the most accurate data (Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019), which would help identify

the key patterns and themes (Kieger and Varpio, 2020). Transcribing was time consuming process, as McMullin (2021) explains spoken language is different to written text, so the researcher must draw upon their knowledge of written language to evaluate it. Silva (2021) explains that computer programmes, such as Microsoft Teams transcription, replace this time demanding process but nevertheless the responsibility of interpretation is still with the researcher. Bennett, Barrett and Helmich (2019) explain that to produce the most accurate data, the researcher should transcribe the interviews themselves. The second step of thematic analysis required the researcher to generate codes in the data set, by identifying parts of data that are relevant to the research question and apply meaningful code-labels to them (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Next, following steps three and four, the researcher generated initial themes across the data set and reviewed them using a thematic table (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Schaab, Adams and Coetzee, 2022). The fifth step required the researcher to reflect on each theme, by comparing how it successfully answers the research question and then naming each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2022). In the final step the researcher produced a research report, weaving together the analytical narrative and data codes to create a cohesive story about the data set that answers the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).

Ethics

Before the research commenced, the researcher and study obtained ethical approval from Edge Hill Universities ethics committee.

Ethics are the moral principles that govern how researchers using human participants should conduct their research (Yip, Han and Sng, 2016), helping to safeguard against harmful effects to the participants (O'Riley and Parker, 2014). Barke (2009) makes clear that although the aim

of research is to benefit both participants and society, it inherently carries risk, however it is the responsibility of the researcher to mitigate the risks to participants (Hendriks et al., 2019). The British Psychological Society (2021) explain that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure their research is conducted in an ethical way. To familiarise themselves with ethical practice the researcher read the NSPCC (2020) Research Ethics Committee Guidance, which explains the principles of good practice.

For participants to take part in the research it is essential that consent is given. This demonstrates the participant understands the research process and what will be expected of them (General Medical Council, 2013). O'Sullivan et al. (2021) explains that it is important that consent is reviewed throughout the research process. With this in mind, written and verbal consent was given at the start of the interview which enabled the interview to begin and be recorded.

All appropriate measures were implemented to ensure participants could not be identified after the data was transcribed, for example pseudonyms were used to completely change names (Heaton, 2022). Also, following GDPR (UK Government, 2018) all consent forms, video recordings and transcripts were stored on Edge Hill Universities OneDrive which is password protected with only the researcher and their supervisor having access. Participants were also given the option to withdraw from the research project, up to 7 days after the interview, thus protecting their autonomy (Melham et al., 2014).

To minimise the risk of harm to both the researcher and participants, safeguarding measures were put in place. Individual participants react differently, (Campbell et al., 2019), so it is important the researcher had a distress protocol in place to follow in the event of participants having an adverse reaction (Whitney and Evered, 2022). This included prior to the interview

being conducted, anyone who expressed an interest in taking part in the research was sent a support leaflet, which explained what actions to take should experience a MH crisis, alongside a range of services that each participant could access at any time or be sign posted to by the researcher.

Reflective position

The researcher is an undergraduate student with an interest in dance. Crane, Sesterka and Houting (2021) explain that due to the flexibility within semi-structured qualitative research extra care must be taken to minimise researcher bias. Researcher bias can occur at any stage of the research process (Pannucci and Wilkins, 2010) and causes inaccurate results and wrong conclusions (Šimundić, 2013). To reduce this bias, throughout the research the same interview schedule was used for all participants, to ensure consistency across the research (Krishna, Maithreyi and Surapaneni, 2010).

Results

Thematic analysis of the interviews developed three key themes when exploring the impact that dance teachers have on an undergraduate dancer's MH and well-being. These themes summerised are favouritism, the dance industry and MH.

Participants have been anonymised and coded, for example participant 1 is represented as P1.

Favouritism

A dominant theme through the research was favouritism, as all participants felt their dance teachers expressed a profound amount of favouritism. This is because they see the same people being given opportunities, such as feedback, being at the front or doing events.

> *"It's got to the point now where most people in the group, if there's an opportunity, everyone knows who's going to get it or be offered it."* (P2)

Most participants expressed that they felt they were not one of the teachers' favourites students, due to their teachers' actions towards them compared to other dance students.

> "*They [the dance teachers] make you feel unnoticed, and they just make you feel like your hard work is just not appreciated sometimes."* (P?)

Not feeling appreciated by their teacher, can negatively impact the dancer's self-esteem and confidence. Not feeling appreciated also had a major impact on the participants resilience, which stemmed from participants feeling that even if they tried their best within the dance

class, in their teachers eyes they will never be as good the favourites, so why try? As a result, a common phrase used throughout the research was ‘it’s not good enough’.

Despite the profound amount of favouritism convey by their dance teachers, participants explained they were unsure as to why their teachers showed it to such an extent.

> *“You just constantly think to yourself, is there a reason I’m not being praised, am I not looking good at it?”* (P3)

Participant 1 further explains this, reflecting that it is not as clear as the teacher’s favourite is the best dancer in the class, causing uncertainty and constant questioning as to why they are not one of the favourites. As a result, this can cause dancers significant stress and anxiety, as they do not know how to improve or change their practice to make themselves a favourite.

Participants described their teachers as having rigid ways of thinking and teaching, which may contribute to and maintain the favouritism throughout their training.

> *“Once a teacher in first year decides they don’t like you or you’re the favourite. That’s it, you’re stuck with that … it’s almost like you get a sticky label stuck to you and that’s it, it won’t get changed.”* (P1)

> *“The constant repetition of, oh this is their thoughts for you. You feel like you’re stuck in a box, and you can’t escape from it. Like that’s you now in their image.”* (P5)

This leaves participants feeling frustrated, as they cannot control or change their teacher's opinion about them, even if it is outdated. As a result of this frustration, dancers can experience feelings of anger towards their teachers.

Dance industry

There was a consensus amongst participants that the dance industry they are training in and will be graduating into, is not an environment which promotes positive MH and well-being. Participants described the industry as 'toxic', which is an environment that can be detrimental to an individual's MH and well-being, as it can lower self-esteem, cause high stress levels, and create feelings of anxiety.

P4 recalls an example of their dance teacher preparing them for the dance industry.

> *"When I started going for interviews, she started to be a bit more harsh. She screamed at me and was like time is money, if a choreographer in the real world did this …"*

The teacher's negative approach towards their student can trigger feelings of self-doubt about their ability to enter the industry. It may also provoke anxiety or trauma responses because of these teaching styles.

As participants have nearly finished their undergraduate training a common area of concern was future employment. Participants felt throughout their training that their teachers were trying to prepare them for the ruthless industry they will be gaining employment in.

> *"The other day I was in a jazz class, it was mixed with different year groups. The teacher made us, third years, put our hands up and she was talking in a patronising*

tone saying, there's people in here that are better than you. And she always says, there's kids out there better than you." (P2)

As a result of this, P3 explains the pressure undergraduate dancers face, from their dance teachers, the dance collage, peers, and family in auditioning for and gaining employment in the dance industry.

"You're expected to be at a level to go out and get any job you go for, and you're supposed to look the best … you've got so much expectation but you're just human."

Dancers face an unrealistic expectation to constantly be at an untouchable level, both at the start of and throughout their dancing career, causing dancers a vast amount of stress and anxiety in ensuring they are at and maintain such a level. This can cause dancers to be vulnerable to experiencing burnout, which creates negative MH and well-being.

To help prepare dancers for the industry, dance teachers often use guest teachers and choreographers. As previously mentioned, a dominant theme is teacher favouritism, however all participant's felt when participating in a guest teacher or choreographers' class, there was an absence of favouritism. This allows dancers to train and perform as their authentic self without the anxiety of favouritism as result positively influencing their creative output.

All participants noted the difference in teaching styles between their usual collage teachers and guest teachers and choreographers.

"He [the guest teacher] was completely different, gave a chilled atmosphere. It just gave a chance to … enjoy dance again." (P5)

Guest teachers and choreographers have a more positive teaching style that the participants usual teachers, which positively impacted their MH. This is because it provides reassurance to participant's that they will gain employment can get opportunities within the dance industry, as their usual teachers consistently make them feel they will not achieve these things. As a result, this gives them confidence, motivation and creates a sense of positive well-being, giving resilience to continue training.

Mental health

Participants explained that a common phrase used by their teachers is 'leave your problems at the door'. They explain that this means when then enter the classroom, it doesn't matter what is going on outside, but it doesn't affect their MH and well-being within the classroom.

This is particularly so when it comes mental versus physical health, as throughout the research participants felt that their dance teachers did not value their MH as highly as their physical health.

P3 reflects on a time they reached out to their teacher for support as they were struggling with their MH.

"I sent a message to a teacher and said I'm having a bad day, mentally drained and got things going on outside of college, I'm going to have to miss your lesson. I sent her a message [on Teams] and I got a message back saying in future please email me. And that was the response I got. She wasn't bothered."

They then compared this experience to when they were physically injured.

> *"Then, the same teacher, I'd just had surgery and I went to her and said I'll be out for 11 weeks, and she was so concerned showing me how to recover, how to strengthen, doing a plan for my work and getting work extended for me."*

This can cause the dancers MH and well-being to further deteriorate, as their students are made to feel like their feelings are not valid, therefore intensifying them. This can create a negative cycle of deterioration, ultimately negatively impacting their training and performance.

Participants were asked if there were any ways their teachers positively impacted their MH and well-being. Although participants struggled to answer, most participants said that they felt their teachers had their best interest at heart.

> *"They are supportive, if you go to them with any problem, got they'll help and support you."* (P2)

By knowing that their teacher has their best interest at heart, causes dancers to feel valued, both within and outside the educational dance environment. As a result, this increases a dancer's self-esteem and confidence, helping them to achieve their potential within dance.

The final theme explores how the participants MH changed over the course of their training; four participants explain that their MH had declined. Participants described how their resilience declined, anxiety increased and lost confidence, ultimately impacting their passion for dance.

Participants teachers teaching styles and subsequent behaviours have had a profound effect on their cognitive process, affecting participants passion for dance. For those who continue

dancing, this negative relationship and teaching style may affect their future within dance, creating a trauma response in feeling apprehensive when entering an educational dance environment, due to negative experiences before their career has even started.

However, P5 said they felt their confidence had increased throughout their undergraduate training.

> *"Definitely I feel more confident in myself. I've been up and down the whole time … but definitely now I'm on the other side saying oh I've done it."*

The results from this research have highlighted that each dancers experience and relationship with their dance teacher is unique and therefore have different impacts on their MH and well-being.

Discussion

Purpose/focus of the study

The aim of this research was to explore the impact that a dance teacher has on a dancer's MH and well-being. This was achieved by interviewing undergraduate dance students and listening to their responses around how they feel their dance teachers impact their MH and well-being, through both conscious and unconscious words and actions. Three themes emerged from the participants interviews, these were: favouritism, the dance industry and MH in dance.

Thematic analysis of the data developed three key themes: favouritism, the dance industry and MH in dance. These results created findings based upon unique dance training experiences.

Favouritism

All participants felt that their dance teachers expressed a profound amount of favouritism, both within classes and the wider college. Within dance literature, there is no research exploring teacher favouritism within dance education. Researchers highlight that favouritism occurs within every aspect of life (Ozler and Buyukarslan, 2011; Hussain, Abid and Rafique, 2019; Quraishi et al., 2021), particularly within education (Okcu and Ucar, 2016; Shneikat, Abubkar and Ilkan, 2016; Ali, Khan and Hussain, 2018) and PE (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012; Barney, Pleban and Dodd, 2019). Pickard and Rinser (2020) explain that favouritism occurs within dance as there is power imbalances and authority between teachers and students. Favouritism is a biased teaching practice meaning giving undue honour to an individual where they do not have the required ability or potential (Shneikat, Abubkar and Ilkan, 2016; Adi, Khan and Hussain, 2018).

The participants expressed that they felt they were not one of the teacher's favourites, which had negative effects on their MH. Within education, Sakcak, Arslan and Polat (2021) explain that favouritism has a wealth of negative consequences, such as decreases in student commitment (Dagli and Akyol, 2019), career achievements (Quraishi et al., 2021) and frustration (Ulug, Ozden and Eryilmaz, 2011). There was uncertainty amongst participants as to why they were not one of the teacher's favourites, with participant 1 explaining how it is not always as clear as the favourite is the best person in the class. Dagli and Akyol (2019) agree with this, explaining that when teachers favourite a person, its not because they are the best, but because teacher favours their personal characteristics.

For participant's, not being shown favouritism made them feel that their hard work is not appreciated by their teachers, which lowered their self-esteem and confidence in their dancing ability. Similarly, research by Conteh (2021) found that individuals who had not been shown favouritism had lower self-confidence than those who had. Participants also commented that their teacher treated their favourites in a more positive way than those who were not their favourites. The participants and scholars highlight the negative impact this can have on self-esteem, with research by VanRossum (2004) with a dance group finding that one-third of dancers stating that their teachers critical and cruel comments damaged their self-esteem. Not feeling appreciated also impacted the participant's resilience, as they understood that their best will not be good enough for their teacher. Research by Adnan, Ismail and Sulaiman (2014) and Lasisi, Constanta and Eluwole (2022) had similar findings, finding that favouritism negatively impacted individuals coping-skills, leaving them with a lack of, and subsequently impacting their resilience. This is because they cannot use coping skills to help them overcome negative experiences (Wu et al., 2020), which they experience because of not feeling appreciated and treated different by their teacher.

During the interviews, participants attempted to rationalise why their dance teachers practised favouritism. It was concluded by participant's that their teachers had rigid ways of thinking, which contributed to and maintained favouritism. Ducci (2019) explains that dance educators are stuck in traditional, old-fashioned teaching methods. Zeller (2017) and Berg (2017;2020) explain that these ingrained teaching methods are patriarchal and authoritarian, and often unconscious. McPherson (2019) agrees with this, stating that traditional dance education has its own cultural characteristics and customs, including favouritism. It is clear to see that when dance teachers show favouritism, it has a negative impact on their student's mental health, particularly for those students who are not shown favouritism.

Dance industry

All participants expressed that they felt the dance industry has a detrimental impact on a dancer's MH and well-being. DeVoldere et al. (2021) explains that creative industries in the UK have been labelled as one of the most negative in Europe. Researchers explain that is because those in the dance industry face a lack of financial stability, dismissal of dance as a 'real profession', a constant cycle of auditioning, being rejected and relentlessly being told that there is someone better (Pecen, Collins and MacNamara, 2016; Ducci, 2019; Brooks and Patel, 2022). Comunian and England (2020) and Hancock and Tyler (2021) highlight that these negative influences have been amplified due to the COVID-19 lockdown, which saw the complete shut-down of entertainment (Moon, 2020; Bronner, 2020). Participant 4 recalled an experience with their dance teacher where, because of trying to prepare them for the dance industry, it triggered feelings of self-doubt in their ability. Sakulku (2011) and Mainali (2020) explain that these feelings of self-doubt are common amongst performers, with around 70% of performers feeling self-doubt throughout their career. Similarly, Hays et al. (2009) found that

feelings of self-doubt were particularly high amongst female performers, all participants were female in this research. However, research by Woodman et al. (2010) shows that feeling self-doubt can benefit an individual's performance. This shows that the feelings dance teachers provoke in their students is highly personal and cannot be generalised.

Apprehensive emotions were held by participants regarding their employment within the dance industry. This was because of their teacher exposing them to experiences the teachers believed they would encounter as a professional in the dance industry. A vast amount of literature highlights the difference between employment within the arts and other labour markets (Paulsen, 2022). There are several reasons for this, including low income (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020), high levels of unemployment (Hedayat, Khan and Hanafi, 2013), are more likely to hold multiple jobs (Throsby and Peteskaya, 2017) and no guarantee of employment (Hopper et al., 2020). Despite these factors Gregory and Interiano-Shiverdecker (2021) highlight that newly professional dancer's receive little support and guidance throughout their career. Meyrick and Barnett (2017) explain a reason these factors may occur is from a lack of funding within the arts, and reductions are still being made.

Due to the nature of the dance industry, participants expressed the pressure they face when entering it. Desai (2021) says a growing amount of research investigates that the dance classroom is to blame for these negative characteristics. Participants and researchers explained that a lot of this pressures stems from their dance teacher, due to the high level of perfectionism expected of them (Nordin-Bates, Walker and Redding, 2011; Eusanio, Thompson and Jaque, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014)). This expected high level of perfectionism was particularly felt by participant 3, who explains that their teachers expect them to be able to get anything they audition for. Researchers highlight that this overwhelming sense of pressure is common

amongst dance students (Elisana, Gougas and Theodorkis, 2010; Stuckey and Nobel, 2010). Similar research by Yang et al. (2022) shows that this pressure is not only felt by undergraduate arts students, but all final year undergraduate students. Creane and Temple (2015) say this pressure can cause athletes to drop-out of their sport. This high level of perfectionism expected of dancers increases their risk for developing MH problems (Limburg et al., 2017; Thomas and Bigatti, 2020).

Mental health in dance

Analysis of the research data and scholars explain how dance education and educators create a negative attitude towards MH (Dwarika and Haraldsen, 2023). Participant 3 explained an experience with their dance teacher, where they explained to their teacher that they were struggling with their MH and their teacher dismissed their feelings. However, when they were physically injured their teacher provided them with a wealth of support. Ducci (2019) questions why dance teachers understand that they cannot carelessly push their dancer's body for the sake of their training but are careless with their MH They explain this is because within dance there is a 'get over it' attitude, as teachers dismiss their student's MH problems.

Participants had mixed reflections when thinking about ways their dance teacher positively promoted their MH and well-being within the educational environment. However, all participants expressed that subconsciously they felt that their teacher did care about their well-being. According to Lombardi et al. (2019) there is a strong correlation between the school environment and a student's well-being. Particularly, systematic reviews by Cotnoir et al. (2014) show when a teacher has a passion for teaching and cares about their students, it positively impacts the lives of their students. Wilkerson (2011) explains it has a particular positive impact on a student's MH and well-being. Hancox et al. (2017) applies to the

educational dance environment, as when dance teachers create a caring environment it promotes a dancer's confidence and readiness for learning.

The final theme explored how the participants MH had changed over the course of their undergraduate training. For most participants, their undergraduate training had negatively impacted their MH and well-being, leaving them with a lack of resilience, confidence and increased anxiety. Summarising previous research, negative MH is common amongst dance students, particularly low self-esteem (Eusanio, Thomson and Jaque, 2014; Kosmidou, Giannitsopoulou and Moysidou, 2017; Ducci, 2019), low resilience (Arbinaga, 2018) and increased anxiety levels (Liu et al., 2016; Ducci, 2019; VanWinden et al., 2020; Fostervold-Mathisen, 2022). Moksnes, Eilersten and Lazarewicz (2016) explains these feelings can trap dancers in a negative cycle of low self- esteem, stress and dissatisfaction, potentially leading to depression and ED's. These feelings caused the participants passion for dance to decrease, leaving them questioning if they want to continue dancing. Researchers explain how training in competitive sport is intense, which can cause athletes to become experience burnout, having a detrimental effect on well-being (Eklund and DeFreese, 2015; Gustafsson, DeFreese and Madigan, 2017). Research by VanWinden (2020) supports this, highlighting that 17% of MH issues amongst athletes are a result of burnout. Gustafsson et al. (2007) explains this is because burnout causes athletes chronic stress, resulting in them dropping out of their training in and future career. Only one participant felt that their teachers increased their confidence throughout their training. This contrasts findings by VanRossum (2004), who found that half of a dance group felt that their teachers inspired them and increased their self-confidence. The impact a dance teacher has on a dancers mental health is highly personal and dependent on several factors, such as the relationship between teacher and pupil and resilience of the dancer.

Unexpected findings

Within this research, two participates reflected upon experiences where their dance teacher had commented on their body image. Participant 1 discussed how their teacher had told them they did not have the right body shape to pursue professional dance training. Similarly participant 4 shares an experience from their dance class, where the teacher explains to dancers that their body needs to be slim and not round, which had a negative impact on their body image. As previously discussed, a dominant theme within research literature was the negative impact that dance teachers can have on a dancer's body image and subsequent ED's (Hincapie and Cassidy, 2010; Anshel, 2019; Åkesdotter et al., 2020; Sundgot-Borgen, 2021; Kalyva et al., 2021; Droia and Numer, 2022). Promoting positive body image is essential within the dance environment, as it creates positive MH and well-being (Gillen, 2015; Allen and Ramos et al., 2019). However, Heiland, Murray and Edley (2008) and Santos et al. (2021) argue that a dancers body image bears importance in the dance environment, as their body is their work instrument and therefore impacts their ability to dance.

Limitations of the study

Although the findings from this research highlighted the impact that dance teachers have on a dancer's MH and well-being, there were limitations of the study that must be addressed.

One area for development is that all participants recruited had the same characteristics, for example a white female, and excluded experiences of individuals with different characteristics. A wealth of previous research, such as by VanWinden et al. (2020) and Gregory and Interiano-Shiverdecker (2021), also experienced the same limitation, as their participants all received training from the same institution and therefore teachers. However, research by Kalyva et al. (2022) recruited participants from three dance schools, which created participants with a range of characteristics, which were presented in a table to highlight the differences. Gysels and Oonk

(2021) agree with this, as they explain that the dance world is becoming more diverse, with individuals with a range of characteristics taking part and training in dance. Therefore, to further develop this research it is suggested to recruit participants from a range of dance colleges offering undergraduate training. This will allow for a range of experiences to be gathered from dancers with different characteristics, adding validity to the research.

An overall limitation of the study is the researcher's ability and experience as an undergraduate research student. The research was conducted independently by the student and has not been peer-reviewed, which would subject the research to scrutiny of experts within dance research, adding validity and quality to the research (Kelly, Sadegheih and Adeli, 2014; Wiley, 2023). Noble and Smith (2015) highlight that all qualitative research lacks validity, due to the involvement of the researcher during the data collection and analysis stages. However, within this research thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, which added validity as it requires researchers to determine whether the themes accurately reflect the meanings within the whole data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To help address this, it is recommended that undergraduate students use reflection (Veine et al., 2019), as it allows them to identify areas for improvement and learn how to improve them.

Future implications

Many of the participants felt that research understanding the impact that their dance teachers have on their MH and well-being was imperative. One implication of this study is that further support is needed for dancers, both for throughout their training and when they enter their new career within the arts. Bennett and Bridgstock (2015) highlight that, unlike other careers, newly professional dancers receive little supervision and support in their new careers. Tahiry and Ekmekcioglu (2021) and Rothwell et al. (2021) highlight that career supervision, particularly

at the start of a career, is essential, as allows time for reflection, having a positive impact on personal, professional and the organisations practice. However, throughout the interviews participants made it clear that, to their knowledge, no such support is available. Bennett (2009) says within the arts, career supervision is essential as dancers must navigate contrasting domains, such as self-employment, specialist skills and unpredictable employment.

Another implication of this study is that more career development and support is essential for dance teachers, to help them to create an educational environment which promotes positive MH and well-being for students. Public Health England's (2021) whole school approach highlights the important role educational environments play in supporting the MH and well-being of their students. To help do this, professional codes of conduct for dance teachers provided by the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) and the Imperial Society for the Teachers of Dance (ISTD) (Aujla and Redding, 2013), guide teachers practice doing this. In the RAD code of practice, it states that dance teachers must have regard for the well-being of their students by demonstrating good practice (RAD, 2022). Similarly, the ISTD states that dance teachers must not give feedback to dancers that is detrimental to their MH and well-being (ISTD, 2022). However, Preece et al. (2015) says that these are not implemented by dance teachers, due to increasing tensions within dance education. To help teachers understand the importance of and how to implement these codes of practice, early career support and ongoing career development is needed. Thompson and Sherman (2014) agree with this, highlighting that more attention needs to be focused on educating coaches within sport.

Recommendations for future research

All participants felt that research exploring the impact that their dance teacher has on their MH and well-being was important. Further research around this topic should occur to support and

promote positive MH and well-being amongst undergraduate dancers, preparing them for a long and successful career within the arts. Throughout the research it was widely recognised that favouritism, being shown it or not, has a profound effect on a dancer's MH and well-being. As a result, further research is needed to explore why teachers show favouritism within the dance classroom (Mainwaring and Krasnow, 2010; Sanna and Nordin-Bates, 2020) and the impact this has on the student (Ali, Khan and Hussain, 2018), particularly in dance.

Conclusion

Overall, this qualitative research has succeeded in gathering undergraduate dance students' experiences of how their teachers impact their MH and well-being. Through participants reflections it was implied that their teachers overall, had a negative impact on their MH and well-being. The results highlighted three main ways a dance teacher impacts an undergraduate dancers MH and well-being, and these were; through showing favouritism, the dance industry they were training to enter and the concept of mental health within dance and dance education. However, the results and scholars highlight that these experiences and subsequent influences on mental health, are highly personal and different for each dancer (Woodman et al., 2010).

Although this study did meet the research aim, it is important to acknowledge that there is scope for further research within this field. The rational for this study was to contribute quality research findings to help understand dancers MH and well-being (Mansfield et al., 2018; Wakeling, 2019; Ducci, 2019; Kim, 2022). Literature highlights undergraduate dance training as being both a protective (Zhang et al., 2021) and risk factor (Mathisen et al., 2022) for MH, due a range of factors within the dance environment and dance culture (Laws, 2005; Grove, Main and Sharp, 2013; Wanke et al., 2015; Ducci, 2019; Hopper et al., 2020; Kalyva et al., 2021). The results from this research suggest that favouritism had a significant impact on a dance teacher's teaching practice, and therefore on a dancer's mental health. As a result, it is recommended that future research is needed to explore why teachers show favouritism within the dance classroom (Mainwaring and Krasnow, 2010; Sanna and Nordin-Bates, 2020) and the impact this has on the student (Ali, Khan and Hussain, 2018).

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