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Unravelling the challenges of rehabilitation and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders in professional ballet dancers

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INTRODUCTION:

Dancers are among the most injured athletes, which will cause repercussions on their physical and mental health, as well as their career (1,2). It is essential to establish strategies to prevent and manage these injuries. However, some challenges arise when preventing and treating injuries, as reported by dancers and health professionals (3). This study explored the experiences and challenges faced by the dancers and staff in a ballet company regarding the rehabilitation and treatment of injuries.

METHODS:

We conducted twenty-two semi-structured interviews with dancers, members of the health team, the artistic staff, and administrative staff for this qualitative study. All participants were employed with the Dutch National Ballet. We audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews, and our analyses followed a thematic analysis.

RESULTS:

According to dancers and other stakeholders, musculoskeletal disorders in dancers cannot be entirely prevented.

“How do you make ballet safe? Dont do ballet. Its not safe. Lets be realistic about it. It isnt safe, and making it safe, I think, impacts the art form. ”

The changes in repertoire during a season and the scheduling were among the challenges most often mentioned by participants.

“The changes in the repertoire. You just dont really have a choice. You just get in there. You wake up one day and then all of a sudden youre in a new ballet world.”

However, it was noted that strength and conditioning programs designed by the health team to prepare the dancers for these changes in the repertoire were perceived as helpful in reducing the risk of musculoskeletal disorders.

“Yes, it is one of the reasons I go extra to the gym. To be able to have more strength in the role that I do. So that you wont get injured as quickly. ”

Other factors deemed important in a dancer’s prevention and management of musculoskeletal disorders were communication with the health, artistic and administrative staff and the trust established between all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION:

Considering the context around the current practices in preventing and managing musculoskeletal disorders in dancers is essential. By better understanding the context, programs will be more effectively targeted to the dancers’ needs.

References:

1. Caine D et al. A Survey of Injuries Affecting Pre-Professional Ballet Dancers. J Dance Med Sci. 2016;20(3):115 26.
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3. Molnar M, Karin J. The Complexities of Dancers’ Pain. J Dance Med Sci. 2017;21(1):3 4.

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