

HIGH PREVALENCE OF HEALTH PROBLEMS IN DANCE STUDENTS

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Objectives: Health problems are highly disadvantageous for dance students, since they can lead to physical and mental discomfort, necessary medical treatment and even absence from classes, rehearsal and performance. However, little insight exists on the health problems of these students. The purpose of this study is to investigate the magnitude and nature of all health related problems in 1st and 2nd year dance students (Bachelor Dance and Bachelor Dance in Education) of the Codarts University of the Arts.

Design: A prospective cohort design.

Methods: During the first three months of the academic year 2015-2016 1st and 2nd year dance students received monthly questionnaires, including the Dutch version of the OSTRC Overuse Injury Questionnaire. This questionnaire includes questions about injuries (substantial versus non-substantial), illness and mental complaints and was developed and validated in a 13-week prospective study of injuries among 313 athletes from five different sports (Clarsen et al., 2012). Questionnaires were handed out on paper during health related classes.

Results: A total of 91 students filled in 258 questionnaires (response rate = 94.5%) during the first three months of the academic year (64.8% female, 53.8% freshmen; mean age = 19 ± 1.35 years). 58.2% of the students were Bachelor Dance students and 41.8% Bachelor Dance in Education students. In 169 of the 258 (65.5%) questionnaires, a health problem was reported. Of the reported health problems, 99 were caused by an injury (66.9%), 27 by an illness (18.2%), 11 by a mental complaint (7.4%) and 11 were other complaints (7.4%). The consequences of all indicated difficulties were reduced volume of activities (45.9%) and reduced performance (47.3%). 19.9% of the problems reported were substantial. The most common injury locations were lower back (22.5%), knee (13.5%), foot (13.5%, including Achilles tendon), ankle (11.2%) and groin (11.2%). 46.4% of these injuries are overuse injuries and 54.2% of these injuries were recurrent. The most common illness symptoms were fever (21.1%), weakness/tiredness (18.3%), sore throat (15.5%) and running nose/sneezing (15.5%). The most common mental problems were depression (27.3%), general low self-confidence (18.2%) and tension with people (13.6%).

Conclusions: The main finding of this study was that a large number of the students reported health problems, especially injuries, during the first period of the academic year. A substantial part of the problems led to reduced performance. Prevention of the physical problems should be focused on the lower back, knee and foot. A substantial part of the injuries was recurrent.

Relevance for dance and music medicine: It is important to monitor health of dance students, since these problems can lead to reduced performance. Future research should focus on developing preventive measures with special attention to recurrent injuries and the lower back, knee and foot.