

Overtraining and recovery in dance: A case study approach

Peta Blevins¹, Luke Hopper², Shona Erskine², and Gene Moyle³

¹MSc, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Australia

²PhD, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Australia

³DPsych, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

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Background: Elite level dance performance involves intense physical training (Wyon, 2010). Dancers are susceptible to overtraining (Koutedakis, 2000), burnout (Quested & Duda, 2011), stress (Noh, Morris, & Andersen, 2003), and fatigue due to overload (Leiderbach, Schanfein, & Kremenic, 2013). Sport science research indicates a balance between training and non-training stress and recovery is needed to achieve performance improvements (Kellmann, 2002; Richardson, Andersen, & Morris, 2008). Little is known about how dancers manage stress-recovery balance to maintain and improve performance. This research provides insight into the experiences of dancers managing the heavy training loads and stress of vocational and professional dance environments.

Methods: Professional ballet (n=4) and contemporary (n=8) dancers participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed participant experiences indicative of underrecovery, overtraining, and burnout.

Results: This study supported the suggestion that dancers experience high levels of physical and psychological stress (e.g., Noh, Morris, & Andersen, 2003), and may have limited understanding of the importance of recovery in preventing maladaptive responses to training such as overtraining or burnout. Further investigation should focus on the importance of recovery as a key component of dance training, including monitoring training load and stress-recovery balance in vocational dance, and investigating methods for improving recovery in dance training.

Conclusions: This research encourages discussion regarding best practice for dealing with stress-recovery balance in dance and increasing awareness and responsibility for individual recovery needs.

New insights: A 'real-world' example of overtraining, burnout, and recovery within a dance specific context, which will highlight the importance of understanding the risk factors that may contribute to these conditions.

Implications: The presentation will alert teachers and healthcare professionals to dancers' perceptions of training and non-training related risk factors that could lead to underrecovery, overtraining, and burnout.

Correspondence

Peta Blevins

Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University

2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley, WA, 6050

p.blevins@our.ecu.edu.au

Biography

Peta completed the MSc Dance Science at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in 2006 and since graduating has worked as a freelance dance teacher, lecturer and researcher specialising in Dance and Performance Psychology, Safe Dance Practice, and Dance Fitness. She has worked with a number of institutions and dance companies in the UK, including London School of Musical Theatre, Bird College, British Ballet Organisation, Dance 2XS, Greenwich Dance and Pineapple Dance Studios. Peta also has a bachelor degree in Psychology and is a qualified theatrical dance teacher, having trained, taught and performed in Australia and the UK in a variety of dance styles. Peta is currently based in Australia and is completing a PhD at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, with a focus on overtraining and recovery in vocational dance training.