

Health and injuries among professional dancers in Switzerland – a national inquiry **Andrea Schärli, Bern, CH**

Dance is a demanding physical activity and therefore injuries occur regularly (e.g., Laws & Apps, 2005). The aim of this study is to report injury occurrence and management among professional dancers in Switzerland and to investigate if the current Swiss health service meets the demands of professional dancers.

An online survey was sent out to all dance companies in Switzerland and was shared among dancers of the freelance dance community. The survey was split into three parts: First, the part about injuries occurrences, injury sites, injury management was based on the 'healthier dancer questionnaire' published by Laws & Apps (2005). Secondly, the complete Self-Estimated Functional Inability because of Pain (SEFIP) scale (Ramel, Moritz, & Jarnlo, 1999) was integrated and third, some open questions on training and dancers' needs were posed. Answers of the entire group were described and some group comparisons were conducted (males vs. females, ballet vs. contemporary dancers, and company vs. freelance dancers). The survey was completed by 113 participants; 82 (73.2%) were female and 30 (26.8%) male. Contemporary dance (n=77, 68.1%) was the most frequent chosen dance form, followed by classical ballet (n=26, 23%). Dancers having worked primarily as freelancers accounted for 64.6% (n=73), while 32.7% (n=37) worked mostly under full-time contract. The mean score of physical and psychological health status (0=poor, 10=excellent) among all participants was 7.14 (SD=1.9) and 7.03 (SD=2.0) respectively. The scores of contemporary (M=7.3, SD=1.9) and ballet dancers (M=6.32, SD=2.2) were significantly different ($t(90)=-2.02, p=.047$). The mean SEFIP score of all participants was 7.07 (SD=5.01). The comparison of freelance dancers (M=6.25, SD=5.37) and dancers under full-time contract (M=8.7, SD=4.6) showed a statistically significant difference ($t(87)=-2.21, p=0.03$).

Overall, the anatomical regions most frequently injured were the neck (n=52, 12.1%), the ankle/foot (n=48, 11.2%), the lower back (n=45, 10.5%), and the knees (n=45, 10.5%). The most frequently injured structure was muscle with 54.1%, followed by joints (31.5%) and skeleton/bones (14.5%). Among all participants, an average of 2.8 injuries per 1000 working hours occurred. Many dancers (n=32) mentioned the need for a better medical support system involving doctors, physiotherapists and osteopaths who know about dance and its requirements. In conclusion, it becomes clear that professional dancers in Switzerland suffer from a high injury rate and that the medical support system can be improved to meet the dancers' needs.

References:

- Laws, H., & Apps, J. (2005). *Fit to dance 2: Report of the second national inquiry into dancers' health and injury in the UK*. London: Dance UK.
- Ramel, E. M., Moritz, U., & Jarnlo, G.-B. (1999). Validation of a pain questionnaire (SEFIP) for dancers with a specially created test battery. *MEDICAL PROBLEMS OF PERFORMING ARTISTS*, December, 196–203. (Ramel et al., 1999)

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