



Safeguarding and Abuse Prevention: Research findings 2022

By Dr Grace Tidmarsh, Research and Teaching Fellow Sport Psychology and Mental Health, University of Birmingham



Introduction

Dance is a widely celebrated artform that provides the opportunity for physical, psychological, and social health and expression. Around 4.8 million people take part in community dance each year, and 40,000 people are estimated to be a part of the professional workforce, for example dancers, choreographers, artistic, administrative and technical support staff, and educators. As dance continues to increase in popularity, the extent to which safeguarding and abuse prevention policies and strategies are understood and can be implemented is essential to protect and ensure an enjoyable and safe environment for . Involvement in dance that is safe and free from abuse supports health and wellbeing and promotes successful performance.





Further exploration

In 2021, the results of the first national survey of safeguarding and abuse prevention in UK dance organisations were released to the dance sector ([link](#)). The project was carried out in partnership with the University of Birmingham, the National Institute of Dance Medicine and Science (NIDMS), and the international safeguarding group Personal Safety in Dance.

The current research extends the project to develop a deeper understanding of what safeguarding and abuse prevention looks like from different perspectives within the dance sector. Interviews were conducted with 9 female dance organisation leaders and 10 female dancers. Dance organisation leaders were from a variety of small, medium, and large scale organisations and included individuals across different roles including

executive directors, associate directors, and safeguarding specialists. Questions asked to organisation leaders covered a variety of safeguarding topics such as policy implementation, resources, training and safeguarding and abuse risks to dancers. Dancers had a range of dance experience from 5-31 years and were from a variety of dance genres including hip hop, commercial, jazz, contemporary, pole, and ballet. Questions asked to dancers included topics such as how organisations involved them in decision making around issues concerning dancers, how teachers create a safe dance environment and what safeguarding and abuse risks dancers face.

Key Findings

Knowledge about safeguarding

Individual knowledge of both staff and dancers plays an important role across the dance context. Emotional abuse was the most discussed form of abuse from both dancers and organisation leaders whilst dancers also raised concerns around boundaries in terms of physical touch. Dancers' knowledge varied about safeguarding policies and how and who to raise concerns with. For example, one participant stated, "We do have policies, but we don't talk about it as much." Additionally, students felt that greater knowledge was needed by their teachers about mental health in relation to safeguarding and expressed a perception that anxieties and worries should be left outside the dance studio. Organisational leaders also expressed that more knowledge was needed in terms of safeguarding specifically within dance.



The power of relationships

Positive relationships which were built on trust meant that dancers felt more comfortable to share concerns. However, where dancers perceived poor relationships with teachers, or others in positions of trust, this impacted the extent to which they were likely to raise concerns. Additionally, dancers also discussed that seniority within the dance context contributed to the extent to which it was deemed reasonable to raise safeguarding concerns, for example: "When I was younger, I don't think I would have been taken seriously or the opinion would've mattered as much." Some dancers also said that the perceived seriousness impacted the extent to which they were likely to raise a concern. For example, one dancer stated, "I'm not confident it will be taken forward, especially if it is a bigger effort to change it and the impact it's having." It is clear that relationships between dancers and those in positions of trust impacts whether a dancer feels comfortable to raise safeguarding concerns.

Working together: safeguarding is everyone's concern

Results demonstrate that dancers and organisation leaders wanted to work towards greater collaboration to ensure awareness and practice of safeguarding and abuse prevention. A key point raised by both participant groups was for greater involvement of dancers in the creation and dissemination of safeguarding policies at all levels. Co-production is becoming more widely used across the field of sport, exercise, and health sciences (Smith et al., 2022). Specifically, organisation leaders discussed greater collaboration with expert organisations on safeguarding and abuse prevention within dance to aid more detailed training.

Conclusions and next steps

This deeper exploration into dancers' and organisation leaders' perspectives on safeguarding and abuse prevention augments and extends findings from the National Survey of Safeguarding/ Abuse prevention in UK Dance organisations. The results demonstrate that there are areas for improvement as well as practices within dance that support dancers to experience a safe dance environment that supports their health and wellbeing.

It is, however, important to note that results from these interviews are not representative of the varied dance community in the UK. Most of the

dancers were university dancers and identified as white. Similarly, all dancers and organisational leaders were female. As this research progresses, it is important that future participants are more representative of the dance community as a whole. Further work is needed to ensure safeguarding and abuse prevention policies and procedures are understood and implemented by organisations and dancers. All dance organisations can make dance a safe, welcoming, and fun environment by engaging with this important work and seeking to embed best practice.

Further information

Info@onedanceuk.org

References

- Cumming, J., Sanchez, E., Bird, G., & Burns., V. (2021) Safeguarding and Abuse Prevention: Research findings 2021. Available from: <https://www.onedanceuk.org/resource/safeguarding-and...-prevention-2021/>
- Smith, B., Williams, O., Bone., L & the Moving Social Work Co-production Collective (2022) Co-production: A resource to guide co-producing research in the sport, exercise, and health sciences, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2022.2052946

