

Dance and Psychological Health: Effect of Dance Participation on Social Development

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Abstract

Dance is listed among the most common physical activities that have been integrated into almost all cultures and societies worldwide. The art of dancing engages an individual's cognitive, social, and physical facets, all of which are integral components of psychological health and wellbeing. The social element of dance has been integrated into the modern health sector and other social settings to influence the relationship between psychological health and wellbeing and social support-related challenges. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate whether engaging in dance has an impact on the social dimension of psychological health and well-being. The initial hypothesis of the study, which was based on a literature review, was that participating in dance positively influences the social dimension of psychological well-being. An online literature review search that was conducted on the Google Scholar database for research published between 2013 and 2023 yielded 169 results from which 20 most recent studies between 2019-2023 were selected for inclusion in the final analysis. Dance promotes social wellness regardless of the settings in which it is performed by influencing the cognitive and behavioral processes regulating social relations among humans. Thus, dance is an effective vehicle for social support and a vital network for healthy social connections. Recent dance-based trends and dance practice characteristics could potentially serve as the new modes of social connections to promote social welfare.

Keywords: wellbeing, dance, physical activity, wellness, social-emotional competence

1. Introduction

1.1 Psychological Health

Psychological health and wellbeing have become popularized in the modern world due to its relevance in rapidly changing lifestyles. Psychological health and wellbeing play an important role in how people socialize, handle stress, make decisions, and approach different aspects of life (Kouthouris et al., 2022). Psychological health encompasses how people think, feel, relate, and exist in their daily lives. An individual's thoughts, perceptions, emotions, behaviors and motivation largely depend on his or her experience and skills to address life challenges (Macaskill & Denovan, 2014). Psychological health is often overlooked due to limited knowledge and understanding of its dynamics. However, psychological health and wellbeing is as important as physical health to an individual's overall health (Salovey et al., 2000). Poor psychological health undermines an individual's mental welfare and trickles into his or her physical aspects of health. For instance, psychological conditions such as stress increase an individual's risk of developing chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. While psychological health is linked to an individual's overall quality of life, individuals can take effective measures, such as dance therapy and enhancing their social support structures, to boost their psychological well-being (Kouthouris et al., 2022). The present study evaluated whether and how participation in dance could influence facets that constitute an individual's psychological well-being. Specifically, this study investigated the psychological effects of dance and its impacts on social health among adults.

1.2 Components of Wellbeing

Wellbeing is multifaceted and has various distinct components (Ryff & Keys, 1995). Wellbeing is a complex interaction of health's mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (Kouthouris et al., 2022). Measures that promote psychological health focus on increasing resiliency and strength in health's different dimensions. The impact of health's distinct dimensions on psychological health often overlap, for instance, suboptimal social health may result in poor emotional well-being.

The mental dimension of health incorporates the thinking and the rational aspect of human health (Tough et al., 2017). Mental well-being largely shapes an individual's perception of life. Mentally healthy individuals have realistic views of life and can effectively adapt to change (Stewart-Brown et al., 2015). Also, mental health shapes how people solve their problems and carry out their personal and professional responsibilities. Additionally, the capacity to learn and utilize information is embedded in the mental aspect of psychological health. Therefore, mental well-being is crucial to individuals at all development stages as it influences their capacity to strive for continued growth and development (Stewart-Brown et al., 2015).

The emotional dimension of health is the subjective component of psychological health and wellbeing (Park et al., 2023). It is mainly concerned with feelings (including anxiety, fear, frustration, love, hate, joy, et cetera) and complex emotional patterns experienced repeatedly. The emotional dimension is shaped by the interplay between physiological arousal, feelings, cognitive processes, and behavioral reactions. For instance, physiological arousal triggers

emotions that are cognitively processed to evoke a particular response (Chatzipanteli et al., 2021; Zapf, 2002). The emotional dimension of psychological health bridges its mental and social components. People's reactions to feelings determine their thought processes and how they relate to others in social settings. Consequently, emotionally healthy individuals display appropriate response to upsetting events in their lives, on the other hand, emotionally unhealthy individuals would display inappropriate reactions to the same events (Park et al., 2023).

The social dimension of wellbeing is mainly concerned with the interaction between individuals in various settings (Keyes 1998). Human beings are innately social, and their well-being is profoundly influenced by their capacity to relate and interact with others. Social health is influenced by an individual's ability to use social resources. People in good social health enjoy a wide range of healthy interactions with friends, family, and community members. Research shows that social ties largely shape an individual's psychological health outcomes (Zhang et al., 2019). Consequently, most strategies for improving psychological health are embedded in its social dimension.

Most people find it difficult to describe and understand the spiritual dimension of health and its relevance to psychological well-being. The concept of spirituality goes beyond religion to include an individual's sense of purpose and meaning in life (Kamitsis, & Francis, 2013). The spiritual dimension of health has to do with an individual's sense of peace and connection with others. An individual might be socially, emotionally, and mentally healthy, but his or her psychological well-being is only attained if her or she has an established sense of purpose and meaning.

1.3 How Dance is Related to Psychology

Dance is one of the commonest physical activities that has been integrated into almost all cultures and societies worldwide. Dance is defined as the rhythmic movement of the body that is usually done in response to music. According to Wargo (2021), dance has been part of human culture for approximately 5000-9000 years. But research studies on the benefits of dance and its relationship with psychological health are relatively recent. The art of dancing engages an individual's cognitive, social, and physical facets all which are integral components of psychological health (Zafeiroudi et al., 2022; Tao et al., 2022). The social aspect of dancing is attributed to its nonverbal language elements through which a dancer expresses emotions and feelings. Moreover, the cognitive aspect of dance is manifested in an individual's capacity to learn, repeat, and recall choreographic movements involved in dancing. Consequently, dance promotes psychological health because it wholly engages all facets of an individual's psychological health.

1.4 Psychological Benefits of Participating in Dance

The psychological benefits of dancing commonly result from its impact on human mental processing. A study by Peter Lovatt revealed that dance facilitates the development of new neural circuits in the brain thereby promoting thought processes and creativity (Bergland, 2018). In addition, dancing enhances divergent and convergent thinking among adults who perform structured improvisational dance movements (Zafeiroudi, & Kouthouris, 2022;

Zafeiroudi, 2021). Consequently, participating in dance fosters an individual's perception of their situation and their self-efficacy in resolving their daily challenges. Besides, Languipo (2019) found that dancing improves brain health and memory thus strengthening an individual's cognitive processes. Other than cognitive processes, dance also upgrades the emotional dimension of psychological health. Emotions emanate from the physiological and neurological demands placed on an individual's body. Harvard Health Publishing (2020) highlights that dance and aerobic exercises have similar neural chemical benefits. Dance stimulates the production of mood-elevating chemicals from the brain that reduce the body's natural response to stress hormones. Wargo (2021) established that dance interventions enhance the mood of older adults. Therefore, dance promotes emotional health among adults thus improving their psychological well-being.

In most cultural settings, dance is viewed as a form of social interaction. Although dance as an art form can be artificially separated from its social context, the social component of dance remains implicit to the individual dancers and their immediate community. The social element of dance has been integrated into the modern health sector and other social settings to address the relationship between psychological health and well-being and social support-related challenges particularly because several events in the recent past have redefined how people interact and form relationships.

1.5 Aim of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate whether engaging in dance results in benefits in the social dimension of psychological health and well-being. The initial hypothesis of the study, according to a review of previous research studies, was that participating in dance positively benefits the social dimension of psychological well-being.

2. Method

An online literature review search was conducted on the Google Scholar database for research published between 2013 and 2023 using the following search terms: "dance and psychological well-being", "dance and psychological health", "dance and psychological benefits", "dance and social benefits". The literature search included peer-reviewed articles in reputable scientific journals. An attempt was also made to select research studies on healthy population groups who were adults excluding kids, pupils, special needs categories, clinical populations with severe psychological and physical diseases, or with multiple or multifaceted morbidities and co-morbidities. The initial search generated 169 results from which 20 recent studies between 2019-2023 were selected for inclusion in the final analysis. Secondary references were selected from primary literature sources.

3. Results

3.1 Dance and Social Health

Technological development has had both positive and negative implications on social well-being and interaction. Orben et al. (2020) mentions that information technology has enhanced communication worldwide. However, information technology has had a detrimental

impact on social skills and relationships resulting from the social deprivation that stems from over-reliance on this technology. Additionally, recent COVID-19 pandemic social restrictions have negatively affected social interactions and relationships. Humphries et al. (2023) demonstrated that the public health and social measures used to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic had detrimental social implications such as social isolation and poor social well-being. Such detrimental social outcomes have triggered the invention of various interventions to enhance social health in contemporary communities. Dance interventions are among the widely utilized interventions to promote social interaction, reduce social exclusion and mitigate social-related challenges (Dadswell et al., 2020). Published literature provides sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of dance in promoting social health, especially by influencing how people maintain and establish healthy relationships.

3.2 How Dance Promotes Social Health

Dance promotes social health by providing limitless interaction opportunities. Being adequately equipped with social skills influences an individual's social connectedness, opportunities to interact with others, self-appreciation, and continued contact (Hansen et al., 2021); factors that are very relevant to older adults who report the highest levels of loneliness and social isolation which put them at risk of psychological issues.

Hansen et al. (2021), who examined the impact of dance on social connection and body appreciation, established that dance is an effective in counteracting social isolation among seniors. In their study, a dance intervention was designed to help participants collaborate through the generation of movements; the impact of dance was assessed through a participant's autobiographical memory. Approximately 70% of study participants made new social contacts during the dance intervention and a significant proportion of them sought further contact with fellow individuals during and after the dance intervention. The dance intervention resulted in changes in body perception among older individuals which had previously undermined their capacity to socialize. Besides, the interaction during the dance intervention accorded seniors a suitable opportunity to participate in collaborative and engaging social activities. According to Salo (2019), such interactions enhance social connectedness and social skills thereby enhancing social well-being. Therefore, dance provides a suitable environment that facilitates interactions and relationship-building.

Dance promotes social health both in its social context and when separated from its social context. The art of dance is often examined and approached from a social perspective since dances are categorized based on their social context or situation. For instance, there are dance performances by couples, folk dances rich in history and culture, entertainment, and structured and improvisational dances. Despite the diverse social orientation, various dances have the same implication on social health and connectedness among individuals.

3.3 Effects of Dance on Social Health

A study by Humphries et al. (2023) examined the effects of dance on social health in isolation. The primary intervention in this study was an online dancing session administered to reduce social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic lock-down period. Study participants had

improved affective states, a desire to interact and increased social and community connectedness. Ambegaonkar et al. (2022) also documented the social benefits of dance among those who participated in dance events. According to these authors, seniors who watched dance performances reported that their youthful memories were revived and that they had strengthened their relationships in old age. Therefore, dance enhances the social well-being of individuals regardless of its setting and context of performance.

Dance alleviates the barriers and social stereotypes that undermine social interaction and healthy relationships in contemporary society. The interplay of multiple factors such as poor nutrition and less physical exercise shape social isolation and poor social health (Braveman, & Gottlieb, 2014). Social-emotional competence among adults and children is the biggest barrier to social interaction and connectedness. Kraft (2019) defines social-emotional competence as an individual's ability to use their attitudes, social skills, and emotional intelligence to establish and manage healthy and supportive relationships. In contemporary settings characterized by social isolation, older adults and adolescents usually have limited social-emotional competencies.

Borowski (2021) evaluated the mechanisms through which dance promotes social-emotional development and individual social well-being. According to Borowski (2021), self-intimacy is one of the mechanisms through which dance promotes social-emotional competence. Self-intimacy arises when one's beliefs, mental state, and physical reality align. Dance engages an individual's cognitive, physical, and emotional aspects hence permitting individuals to develop the self-awareness and self-esteem needed to engage in social interactions. Additionally, dance enhances social wellness through other mechanisms which include embodied cognitive learning, synchrony and a supportive learning environment. These factors empower individuals to counter social-emotional competence barriers and actively engage in social interactions.

Social health is also undermined by social stereotypes in contemporary society that are more elaborate in intergenerational relationships. Such barriers limit the interactions between older and younger generations. Douse et al. (2020) conducted a study exploring the impact of intergenerational dance projects on the social and psychological well-being of young and older participants who were collaboratively involved in creating a dance performance; a largely understudied topic. Dance had a positive impact on social health of both the young and the old. Study participants demonstrated increased confidence and willingness to interact with others, and working relationships were established during the project. Importantly, older adults reported joy and satisfaction from engaging with younger participants, debunking the stereotypes that limiting intergeneration social interactions and healthy relationships. Therefore, dance strengthens social health by alleviating the factors that limit social interactions by creating an enabling environment and setting for individuals to promote their social competencies.

Social health is an important social support and network vehicle. Social support and social networks are integral aspects of social well-being. People with minimal social support and socially isolated groups have a higher incidence of mental illness and poor psychological

welfare (Mishra, 2020); problems that are compounded when they experience other challenges, such as poor physical health, social-economic crises, and political problems. Social connectedness increases unity and capacity to overcome such challenges.

3.4 Effects of Folk Dance on Social Development Participant Flow

A study by Oparina et al. (2020) examined the effects of folk dance on personality formation and creative education among adolescents. The authors note that social development is critical to adolescents' psychological health. Folk dance has been used to promote cultural traditions and social development among adolescents. Folk dance, an interactive activity among youths, promoted their interest in culture and people thereby enriching their cultural understanding and sense of belonging to their community. In another study, Baxter (2020) examined the effect of ballroom dancing on adolescents' social and emotional intelligence. Study participants had improved social and emotional learning, especially as regards their social awareness and relationship skills. Moreover, the relationships and interactions among the dancers improved over the study period as they became acquainted.

3.5 Effect of Cultural Dance on Social Development

Calçada and Gilham (2022), who explored the effect of cultural dance on social development among learners, established that dance promotes people's efficiency in establishing social support and networks necessary to address their social challenges. In their study, Biodanza dance promoted a sense of belonging among learners. They also found that integrating Biodanza dance in schools promoted effective problem-solving skills and mitigated social problems, such as violence and isolation, among learners.

A related study by Smith (2018) revealed that traditional dance is an effective vehicle for identity construction and social engagement among communities facing social crises. In the same study, Karen's traditional dance effectively promoted and maintained the cultural identity and unity of communities following forced migration. The author illustrates that dance sessions and events enhanced in-group social connections and opportunities to participate in constructive and familiar cultural activities. Study participants relied on traditional dance to create social networks and build the social support they needed to thrive in unfamiliar social settings. Similarly, Griffiths (2023) identified dance as the most effective vehicle for establishing a social support network and enhancing social welfare in a contemporary online space. Despite the negative association between social media and deteriorating social health, dance has an untapped potential to strengthen the social support availed to individuals.

4. Discussion

Social health, an integral element of an individual's psychological well-being, is concerned with how people effectively relate and interact with each other. Dance is a universal activity that influences people's interaction and association worldwide. Dance engages all aspects of an individual's psychology including cognition, emotions and behavior. Participation in dance is associated with multiple psychological benefits including improved cognitive process, self-efficacy and emotional welfare.

The current research study that examined the effects of dance on social wellness from multiple points of view was prompted by recent changes and developments that have altered human social connections. Dance promotes social wellness mainly by providing opportunities and resources that support social interactions and connectedness. A human being's capacity to interact and relate with others, and thus his or her welfare, stems from his or her innate social nature. Dance bolsters individuals' capacities to interact by bringing unique individuals together and engaging their psychological facets in a common activity. Dance activities serve as interaction platforms that facilitate social engagements and relationship formation.

Furthermore, dance promotes social wellness regardless of the social nature of the setting in which it is performed. Dance influences the cognitive and behavioral processes that regulate social relations among humans. In addition, dance alleviates barriers to effective social relations and interaction among people hence promoting social wellness. There is sufficient evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of dance in addressing both personal and societal limitations to interactions. The self-intimacy impact of dance promotes individual efficacy in debunking existing barriers to effective social processes. Moreover, the emotional dimension of psychological health bridges psychological health's mental and social components. People's reactions to feelings determine their thought processes and how they relate to others in social settings.

Lastly, dance is a vehicle for social support and networking. Dance offers avenues to build new relationships and strengthen existing relationships with others through opportunities to connect with others. Dance helps to boost self-confidence particularly when dancers focus on physical movements and enjoy the positive feelings that come with them. Furthermore, dancing encourages creativity and self-expression both of which can help improve self-esteem. Dance is an integral aspect of each society's culture and norms. Dance acts as the glue which links community members together under familiar and related cultural conditions. Since dance is a universal language, it is often used to promote social networks and harness social support in contemporary society. Integrating performance arts, especially dance, with social media has revolutionized how social communities are formed.

Recent viral dance-based trends and characteristics of dance practice have become the new modes of social connections. Participants in such trends report a sense of connectedness and belonging to a wider society, thereby enhancing their social welfare. Research findings demonstrate that dancing can reduce stress and improve mental well-being since the physical activity involved in dancing can help release mood-enhancing endorphins. Dancing can also help to reduce anxiety and depression as it helps to distract an individual from negative thoughts. Therefore, dance is an effective vehicle for social support and a network necessary for healthy social connections.

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