

**PROFESSIONAL FINNISH DANCERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

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ABSTRACT

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Dance is an extraordinary sport for not only having physical demands but also an artistic point of view with aesthetic, expressive and creative features. In professional dance field the high-pressure situations typical for dancers, such as auditioning for jobs, learning choreography or new skills fast, creating on the spot or with time pressure, taking care of physical fitness and performing, might occasionally require a lot of the psychological capacity as well as physical. The aim of this study consequently was to examine further on psychological well-being of professional dancers currently working in the industry in Finland.

We interviewed six dancers with various demographic backgrounds, as well as lengths and descriptions of their careers in the dance field in Finland. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used in this research. Interviews were structured according to the research questions and included the areas of "Perceptions of well-being", "Factors challenging psychological well-being", "Perceived impact on well-being", "Factors supporting psychological well-being", "Experiences of coping techniques", "Perceptions of psychological well-being's current state in the Finnish dance field", and "Dancers' suggestions to support their well-being". Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, through which the greatest commonalities amongst the participants' answers were examined, which led to choosing the main themes and subcategories for each area of the interviews.

Conclusion of the study was that there is great amount of stressors and pressure working in the dance field, and more careful attention should be paid in the psychological well-being of the professional dance field. There is more and more discussion around the topic but still not enough, and concrete measures should be taken in the practical level.

As this research was executed in qualitative measures to examine the deeper individual perceptions and experiences of the psychological well-being of professional dancers, a quantitative study about the overall state of this topic would be extremely interesting. Also, a study conducted from the point of view of other professionals working in the dance field would be interesting and complete the picture of the phenomenon in question.

Key words: Professional dancer, Psychological well-being, Coping

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1 INTRODUCTION

Dancing is considered a physically and mentally challenging sport discipline. We can assume, due to its holistic nature, that it puts significant stress on the dancers' overall well-being. Dancing is a unique combination of art and sport, and the athletic activity that this discipline requires appears to lack of specificity and periodicity in training, movement in extreme ranges of motion, artistic expression, and musicality (Amegaonkar et al., 2020). Due to the emphasis of dancing being mostly recognised as a form of art, its athletic sport aspect is easily dismissed. Dancers, especially individuals training at a competitive or professional level, knowingly encounter large amounts of internal and external pressure and expectations, which can occur both in training and performance settings. It has been examined that one common mental well-being strain characteristic amongst dancers is being prone to perfectionistic tendencies such as setting unrealistically high personal standards and obtaining overly critical evaluation of mistakes and oneself, which is tangible because just like in many other sports, the means for success is either near perfect or flawless performance (Nordin-Bates et al., 2017). This is why acknowledging these tendencies in dancers' psychological well-being and emphasising the importance of the use of holistic training approaches supporting both physical and psychological well-being of dancers, would be an extremely crucial matter for the promotion of enhanced psychological well-being and reduced ill-being amongst dancers.

Considering the state of dancing, as a topic of research, there is surprisingly limited number of studies, which is interesting, because dance is such a global and generally humane phenomenon. However, the number of studies conducted on dance has been increasing, and it has been recognized and examined as a significant entity and there is no longer such a need to describe and analyse it only from the perspective of western science- (Hoppu, 2003). Psychological well-being and ill-being are concepts that have been more researched in the recent years, and it has become common as a topic of research, but these studies have been generally conducted about athletes in other sports. Research that has been conducted about

dancers specifically has focused mostly on the physical factors related to dancers' well-being, the psychological factors haven't been quite as much researched to date. In addition, not much of research has been conducted about professional dancers' psychological well-being. This creates a need for better understanding of the topic. Thus, it creates a need for more research to be done, and that is the reason why we considered this research topic to be of significance to guide the future directions that more research in this area should take.

Since most of the research in the area of psychological well-being and ill-being and their significance have been studied more in other sports rather than dancing, we will first write about these phenomena related literature in general sport context. Later in the theory part, we will go deeper into the professional dance field, specifically in Finland, where our research took place.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Psychological well-being in sport

As for the general definition of psychological well-being, it is very multidimensional and individual, and therefore difficult to define to apply even to a specific group of people, not to mention the whole population. Researchers have noticed the importance of psychological well-being on one's quality of life and this has increased the amount of research conducted about the topic (e.g. Smith, 2015), even if the perception of the definition is not always unanimous (e.g., Arajärvi & Thesleff, 2020).

Literature seems to use the terms *psychological well-being* and *mental health* side by side and even as synonyms. Well-being is seen as a wider umbrella term comprising the experience of optimal well-being and ability to function (Ryan & Deci, 2001), and health as a notable part of well-being. For instance, Bar-On (1988) refers to psychological well-being as overall psychological condition, whereas health would mean more of an "absence of illness". Large cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions can be seen in this broad concept of psychological well-being (Bar-On, 1988).

On the other hand, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) widely used definition states health to be “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”, using the terms of well-being and health in quite similar meaning but also giving mental health an inseparable and vital part in overall well-being. Further they list acknowledging one’s own abilities, coping with everyday life stress, and being able to work effectively and contribute to their community, belonging to mental health as a state of well-being. (WHO, 2022)

One common definition of well-being is dividing the concept into two general perspectives. In hedonistic approach, pain avoidance and pleasure attainment are in the center of the definition of well-being. The other perspective, the eudaimonic approach, evolves around self-realization and meaning, and emphasizes the significance of functioning in measuring the degree of one’s well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).² Lundqvist (2010) presents an integrated model of global and sport-related well-being that uses the foundation of hedonistic and eudaimonic division of well-being. She also raises the issue of defining the term of well-being in the context of competitive sports and hopes the future research to emphasize the conceptual framework (Lundqvist, 2010).

Rath and Harter (2010) have provided a measurement for well-being that includes five different elements or areas of well-being that should be taken into consideration in individuals’ overall well-being. These five elements are Career Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing, Financial Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing, and Community Wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010,⁵⁻⁶). Well-being is a combination of different factors, and this measurement theory brings them all together. These areas interact and influence each other, and they all have an effect on individuals’ overall well-being.

Career Wellbeing considers individuals’ abilities to be content with what they do in their daily lives, how they use their time during each day. Social Wellbeing is the element of having love, and strong and lasting relationships in your life. Financial Wellbeing focuses on

individuals' abilities to manage their economic life sensibly. Physical Wellbeing emphasizes health and having enough energy to complete tasks daily. Lastly, Community Wellbeing is the element of being able to engage in different ways within the area where individuals live. People generally can have success in one of the elements, but only 7% are thriving in all of them (Rath & Harter, 2010). It is important to have consideration for all five areas of well-being because all of them are connected to one another. They all interact with each other and thus create a wholesome understanding of one's well-being. This measurement theory of Rath and Harter was used in our research interviews to gain an overview of the interviewees' perceptions of these five elements of well-being, and how they present themselves in their personal lives reflecting on their personal experiences within the dance industry.

In addition to Rath and Harter's theory, Ryff (1995), who originally brought the term 'psychological well-being' to well-being research, has listed many different models and definitions for the concept of well-being as it has developed through time in her article Psychological Well-being in Adult Life. She states the key dimensions of well-being are: self-acceptance, positive relationships with other people, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth and purpose in life that according to her connect these different models and theories (Ryff, 1995). These dimensions were visible in the interviewees' answers and were used in the data analysis. We see that Rath and Harter's (2010) and Ryff's (1989) theories are in line with each other to some dimension and are both used in our study.

Well-being has been researched more in other sports, but there is research done in dance as well. There is a study focused on elite-level ballet dancers, and this showed similar results of dancers perceiving considerable amount of psychological pressure to perform regularly at a high level. Injuries or for instance negative mental states, poor focus or depression negatively influence their performance, which puts the dancers in risk of losing their position in the dance team (Adam et. al, 2004).

There is evidence that athletes compared to non-athletes experience less eating disorder symptomology and have more healthy psychological functioning (DiBartolo & Shaffer, 2002). However, a study comparing elite athletes' self-narrative profiles to their psychological well-being revealed that athletes that had purpose-based narrative identity also had positive results on psychological well-being whereas athletes with traits like high perfectionism, fear of failure, and contingent self-worth demonstrated the highest scores of psychological ill-being such as depression, anxiety, shame, and lowest levels of life satisfaction (Houltberg et al., 2018). Simons and Bird (2022) studied the significance of coach-athlete relationship and social support for well-being and found positive correlations between the variables.

1.2 Ill-being in sport

Psychological ill-being is viewed as the presence of psychological dysfunction (Stebbing, et al., 2012; Smith, 2017). Even though there might be similarities, psychological ill-being, in its meaning, is different from mental illness/disorders. Mental illness/disorders stem from psychiatry and they have clinical significance (e.g., manic depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, personality disorder). Psychological ill-being, on the other hand, defines psychological dysfunction in a broader sense and considers the possibility of being vulnerable to mental health disorders (Clow & Edmunds, 2013; Ryff et al., 2006; Smith, 2017). Psychological ill-being can be viewed from two perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic. The hedonic perspective is the appearance of negative affect such as depressive symptoms (Stebbing et al., 2015; Smith, 2017). The eudaimonic perspective is the mandatory feeling for an individual that the activities they are participating in are worthy and according to their values (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Smith, 2017). Thus, concepts such as devaluation of the activity represent this feeling of detachment from an activity (Smith, 2017), which can sometimes present itself as burnout.

Burnout can be experienced through physical and mental exhaustion, depersonalization, cynicism, feelings of inefficacy, and the devaluation of participating in activities and it was identified as a psychological syndrome by Maslach and Jackson (Nordi-Bates et al., 2017; Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1986; Smith 2017). In the case of athletes, burnout has been viewed from three core symptoms, which are a reduced sense of accomplishment, physical and emotional exhaustion, and sport devaluation (Raedeke, 1997; Raedeke & Smith, 2001; Smith, 2017). When experiencing a reduced sense of accomplishment, athletes perceive their sporting abilities and achievements of being insufficient (Smith, 2017). Individuals do not feel capable of reaching their goals or are consistently underperforming, without considering objective success (Raedeke, 1997; Raedeke & Smith, 2001; Smith, 2017). The second symptom relates to experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion, athletes lack emotional resources that would be required and expected of them to perform routine activities. Individuals feel the sensation of being drained just from participation and have difficulty recovering any energy. In addition, the physical demands of training and competition add to physical exhaustion, which goes together with emotional exhaustion. The last symptom is related to experiencing sport devaluation, athletes have reduced interest to engage in their sport and they also lack interest in their performance. Individuals can start from a motivated attitude towards their sport and end up developing resentment towards it and adopting a cynical attitude, which can lead to them leaving the sport.

There have been different suggestions for the causes that lead to the development of burnout. One of these is the unidimensional identity development and external control model (Coakley, 1992) that emphasizes the social environment being the main cause for burnout rather than stress. According to this model, stress is either an outcome or symptom of burnout, not the cause for it. It is about the way sport is structured that hinders athletes' personal control and decision-making, which results in limiting athletes' own identity, when the focus is put on success and achievement within the specific sport. This will develop into stress, and when

setbacks occur, eventually into burnout (Smith, 2017). Another suggestion for burnout's developmental causation is the self-determination theory (SDT). SDT assumes that if the psychological needs are not being met (autonomy, relatedness, and competence), this can eventually develop into burnout (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Smith, 2017). Through this theory, burnout can appear as a result of either low levels of intrinsic motivation or high levels of amotivation (Cresswell & Eklund, 2005a; Smith, 2017).

Another frequent representation of ill-being amongst athletes is depression. Depression appears as a lowered mood, commonly as a state of sadness (Ingram et al., 2009 as cited in Smith, 2017). It can be chronic, recurrent, and seriously impact on quality of life (Caliyurt, 2008 as cited in Smith, 2017). Due to the increasing level of awareness about athletes' tendencies and vulnerability to depression, there has been some suggestions for possible risk factors. To name a few, these factors can be related to e.g., poor performance, injuries, overtraining and involuntary career termination (Smith, 2017). In addition, more general factors can be e.g., life events, social support, unhelpful coping strategies, and various personality traits (Frank et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2016; Wolanin et al., 2015; Smith, 2017).

It is evident that sport can create several positive outcomes and at the same time increase well-being and reduce ill-being. However, it should be noted that every person is an individual and the outcomes of sport participation can differ from one another (Smith, 2017). Considering athletes, they face a lot of pressure and expectation in their sport engagement, and for some this can be the cause of increased mental health risk factors and their ill-being (Schinke et al., 2017; Smith, 2017, 4). Some of them put all their time, energy and effort into the sport and working on themselves as an athlete, and they set aside other life domains and activities (Stephan & Brewer, 2007 as cited in Smith, 2017). They are expected to dedicate their lives to the sport and be always in their peak physical and psychological condition (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Smith, 2017). In addition, they are expected to cope with challenges and setbacks they might have to face such as performance expectations, injuries, and career

termination, which is something that every athlete has to deal with at one point or another in their careers (Mellalieu et al., 2009; Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011 as cited in Smith, 2017). Similar to physical training and the adequate recovery it requires, psychological demands should be tended to with suitable strategies to support athletes' mental health (Kuettel & Larsen, 2019).

In the recent times, athletes have been reporting their experiences of psychological dysfunction more commonly (Smith, 2017). There has been an indication on data of high rates of psychological distress and disturbance amongst athletes (Markser, 2011; Schinke et al., 2017). Different forms of ill-being, such as depression, eating disorders and suicide ideation, have been more talked about publicly by athletes, even amongst high profile athletes. (Smith, 2017). This form of open discussion about ill-being helps to reduce misinformation and prejudice associated with individuals' experiencing ill-being (Sartorius, 2007; Smith, 2017). This open discussion is extremely important, because generally negative attitudes towards mental health and ill-being can prevent athletes from seeking the support they would really need. Thus, awareness on ill-being and putting effort on normalising discussions about the topic has been crucial in creating positive action for the sake of this matter- (Smith, 2017). In addition to open discussion, research is essential in providing a better understanding of the prevalence and forms that ill-being represents itself amongst athletes. Enough research also creates enhanced possibilities for risk factor detection, and preventive and intervening actions. This information is vital, so that required support and positive action for the cause of athletes' better well-being can be provided by key stakeholders such as governing bodies, coaches, medical staff, sport psychologists, teammates, and parents (Schinke et al., 2017; Smith, 2017).

1.3 Coping

Coping techniques are important for every human being, but ever so important for an athlete such as a dancer. Dancers with insufficient coping techniques are more prone to injuries,

especially in stressful situations. According to Bryant (2017), coping techniques are, in addition to pain appraisals and injury status, essential factors for dancers' mental well-being and performance outcomes (Bryant, 2017). Coping as a concept involves thoughts and behaviours mobilized to manage internal and external situations that individuals find stressful (Algorani & Gupta, 2022). When these stressful situations or events are too challenging for an individual and they perceive their internal and external resources to be insufficient to overcome this challenge, they will likely experience stress. Coping techniques intend to align individuals' demand and available resources, thus reduce perceived stress and possible negative emotions that are experienced due to the stress response. (Sirois & Kitner, 2015). Different from 'defence mechanisms', which are subconscious or unconscious adaptable responses intended to either reduce or tolerate stress, coping techniques are conscious and voluntary mobilization acts. Coping techniques, or styles, are usually quite stable traits which set the manners in which an individual behaves in a situation where they face stress (Algorani & Gupta, 2022).

According to Algorani and Gupta (2022), coping is usually divided into two areas of reactive and proactive coping. Reactive coping stands for a reaction that follows after a stressor, and proactive coping represents trying to neutralize any future stressor (Algorani & Gupta, 2022). According to a study conducted by Noh, Morris and Andersen (2002) in which they wanted to characterize professional ballet dancers' perceived stressors, they made a finding that the most dominant stressors were fear of injury, dance directors' criticism, and competition for roles (Noh et al., 2002, as cited in Bryant, 2017). This enlightens the understanding that there are many factors that dancers have to focus, and there are a lot of stress factors, coming from internal and external sources.

There are several ways in which different people cope the most efficiently, even the same individual can have distinct ways to cope in a variety of situations. These four main categories for coping mechanisms are problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social coping. In problem-focused coping, there is a need to address the problem which

causes the stress. This includes actions such as active coping, planning, and suppression of competing activities. In emotion-focused coping, any negative emotion that is associated with the issue is aimed to be decreased. This includes positive reframing, acceptance, and even humour. In meaning-focused coping, different cognitive strategies are used to derive and control the significance of the stressful situation. Lastly, in social coping, there is a need to find emotional or instrumental support from their community in order to decrease stress- (Algorani & Gupta, 2022-). Even though most coping techniques can be seen as adaptive or successful, at least in the short-term, due to them providing an immediate relief to an individual, those measures that create more permanent and lasting changes are more commonly considered as being adaptive or successful (Sirois & Kitner, 2015).

Maladaptive coping styles, in contrast to adaptive coping styles, aim for an immediate relief from any negative feelings of threat or harm experienced in a stressful situation or event. As in emotion- or problem focused coping, an individual desires to perceive themselves to have control of the situation, which does not address the actual source of the stress itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 as cited in Sirois & Kitner, 2015). Therefore, coping styles that rather avoid than solve the problem to gain a short-term emotional relief are considered as being maladaptive. In maladaptive coping styles, individuals' demands and available resources to deal with a stressful or challenging situation do not align, the connection between them may even become wider, which results in the perceived stress to be major. Maladaptive coping styles can be cognitive (denial) or behavioural (disengagement) (Sirois & Kitner, 2015).

1.4 Well-being phenomena in dance context

Dance is a concept that is quite challenging to define, especially because it is a combination of different factors which are associated with the specific definition. There are several factors that influence the definition of dance, such as historical, cultural, linguistic, philosophical, physical, and artistic matters (Parviainen, 1994; Asikainen & Kauppila, 2021).

For these reasons, dance is not a concept that can be easily described or defined in only one form. It is important to consider different aspects of dance and allow several definitions for it, depending on the context and the prevalent environment in which it occurs. Dance can be divided into performing and committed dances (Anttila, 1994), and in a rather similar form, into social and art dances (Nieminen, 2007). As an example, performing dances can be viewed as art dances, which can involve differing forms of dance theater, classical ballet, and modern dance, when they include expressional functions of sorts. Considering social and committed dances, there needs to be a social or communal function, when dance is a part of people's lives in one form or another and the main aim for dance is not to perform. A few examples of these dances are ritual dances, social dances, barn dances, and dance therapy (Anttila, 1994; Nieminen, 2007, as cited in Asikainen & Kauppila, 2021).

In addition to these categories mentioned above, there are several forms of dance that do not fit fully into either or which are a combination of both categories in their characteristics. Some of these forms are street dances, for example hip hop, which started as a committed dance form and shifted towards performing dance as well. There are also other folk dances and historical dances that started with the same aim of social interaction and eventually shifted to the performing side as well (Anttila, 1995, as cited in Asikainen & Kauppila, 2021). Dance has evolved from these forms into also the areas of competitive sports, entertainment industry and physical exercise. The meaning and mission of dance changes constantly throughout different times in the world and in different cultures, which means that the same exact form of dance can have a different meaning for each dancer. Different dance forms keep on being composed, and these forms have come closer to one another and, in some instances, have common meanings for dance. This has led to challenges considering these categorizations and has made them somewhat problematic, but nevertheless they can give some kind of directions and raise needed discussion about the topic (Nieminen, 2007, as cited in Asikainen & Kauppila, 2021).

Though limited research has been conducted about the psychological well-being of dancers, available evidence shows that dance can have an impact on individuals' psychological well-being. Research conducted by Gurley, Masee and Neuringer (1984) examined the differences of the effects that dance classes have on college students' psychological well-being compared to sports and academic classes. Dance and sports classes were significantly more beneficial by decreasing anxiety and depression compared to academic classes. When compared to sports classes, dance was discovered to provide the participants of the research with more positive evaluations of psychological well-being, such as feeling creative, confident, relaxed, excited, motivated, healthy, intelligent, and energetic. One reason for this result might be the combination of art and physical exertion that dance has. Generally, in sports the goal-related and competitive aspects of physical activity are more in the central focus, compared to dance where the expressive, creative, and aesthetic aspects are more emphasized (Gurley et al., 1984). This research brings an interesting point of view to the studies that have been conducted about dance and emphasizes also the positive impact of this sport's art aspect. This aspect can often be considered as a strain on dancers because perfectionism is very commonly experienced by people who work in the field of art and thus can create a lot of stress. Even though this is true, the positive impact of the art aspect should not be forgotten either. Dance creates the opportunity for people to express themselves in many different forms and, for many, it works as a way of working freely through their feelings and emotions.

Aujla and Padham's research (2014) investigated the prevalence of passion that professional dancers had for dance considering their psychological well-being. In addition to prevalence, they also examined the types of passion these dancers were experiencing and whether these different types had differing effects on their psychological well-being, focusing on phenomena such as eating attitudes, self-esteem and perfectionism. The majority of the dancers were passionate about their art, and they internalized it in a flexible and harmonious manner. Harmonious passion amongst the dancers predicted better self-esteem, compared to

obsessive passion which predicted self-evaluative perfectionism, conscientious perfectionism, and disordered eating attitudes. The study also suggested that a training environment which is autonomy-supportive can be more beneficial in the development of harmonious passion. (Aujla & Padham, 2014). The results of Murcia and colleagues' research (2010) about the perceived benefits of dancing on well-being showed that dancing was perceived to be a multidimensional activity which provided several positive effects for well-being, especially dimensions such as "emotional benefits", "well-being and meaningfulness", "creativity benefits", and "emotional benefits". In addition to the emotional and physical benefits that the dancers had experienced through this sport, they also reported positive influences that dance had brought for their self-esteem, social relations, spirituality, and stress coping strategies. (Murcia et al., 2010).

The type of climate created by coaches has been widely examined to have an impact on dancers' well-being, as well as their ill-being. Many have researched different dance environments and the impact of using Deci and Ryan's (2000) SDT as a framework to base on a coaching climate and recognizing the basic needs provided in the basic needs mini-theory (BNT) embedded in SDT, which are competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These studies' findings have shown that coaching approaches that promote SDT and obtain task-involving climates, in which personal improvement and effort are rewarded, mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than a cause for punishment (in contrast to ego climate), cooperative learning is immanent, and everyone involved has an essential role (Roberts, 2001 cited in Draugelis et al., 2014), create the most benefits for dancers and enhance their well-being (Quested & Duda, 2009; Draugelis et al., 2014). The findings also illustrate the benefits of fostering the basic needs theory principles and need satisfaction within dance environments, which could have a crucial role in the promotion of healthy participation in dance settings (Quested & Duda, 2008; Hancox et al., 2017). These factors also work as developmental or preventive actions for dancers' ill-being, such as burnout (Quested & Duda, 2011).

2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine how dancers, specifically individuals training in the sport at a professional level, perceived psychological well-being on a personal and a communal level within the dance industry. The research examined professional dancers' experiences and perceptions of their well-being, focusing mainly on its psychological aspect, working in the dance industry in Finland, and aimed to explore the main phenomena that arose on this topic during discussions with professional dancers. The research questions for the thesis were as follows:

1. How do professional dancers describe their experiences of their psychological well-being and factors supporting and thwarting it in the dance industry?
2. What kind of knowledge, if any, do professional dancers have of different coping techniques and how have they applied them during their career?
3. How do professional dancers perceive the current state of psychological well-being within the dance industry in Finland and do they have any suggestions for improving the situation in the future, if needed?

These research questions aimed to investigate personal experiences of psychological well-being that professional dancers have undergone in their careers. The questions also examined the amount of knowledge and practical experience professional dancers had on coping techniques that could be used in psychologically challenging situations, and what did they consider to be the current state of psychological well-being within the dance industry in Finland. There was also the intention to examine whether professional dancers considered

psychological well-being to be an important aspect to take notice of and incorporate when training and working in this specific form of sport.

3 METHODS

This study was done using qualitative research methods. Interviews with open-ended questions about well-being, emphasis being on the experiences and perceptions of psychological well-being, were conducted for six professional dancers working in the dance industry in Finland at the time of the research. The participants were chosen with different backgrounds and attributes to gain as versatile and comprehensive overview of the topic as possible. This study conduct design was chosen due to the possibility and space that it gave for the participants to express their experiences and perceptions freely during the interviews. In addition, it was interesting from the researchers' point of view to observe which themes from the professional dancers would arise in the interviews and what were the greatest commonalities amongst the participants' responses.

3.1 Participants

Six professional dancers with different demographics and dance backgrounds were chosen for the data collection. These dancers were chosen considering their background and attributes, such as age, gender, dance style, length of career, and education in dance, to gain as versatile insights and comprehensive overview of the topic as possible. The participants were working in the dance industry in Finland at the time of the research, and they had dance style backgrounds, training experiences, and career paths that greatly varied.

3.2 Researchers' positioning and field relations

Our connection to the field, and our interest for this topic as researchers, stems from personal experiences of dancing in leisure, competitive, and professional settings in the dance field in Finland. We shared experiences of our own perceptions of successes, shortcomings, and challenges, and ended up emphasizing the importance of psychological well-being when performing in dance and thus became interested in studying other dancers' experiences and

perceptions on the same matter. In our performance centered society, the significance of well-being is starting to be increasingly more noticed, and the link between individual's performance in all kinds of work, practice and situations of high demands and risks, and their overall well-being has been scientifically proven (Miller & Kerr, 2002). We have experienced a lack of emphasis on the well-being aspect in the dance field and think it would be worth exploring more, specifically the psychological aspect of well-being. Through this research we wanted to find out if others had experienced similar things as we together as researchers, had shared and discussed. We acknowledged the fact of having possible biases on the topic due to our own experiences that could influence our data collection. The bias that we had was about the lack of emphasis put onto individuals' psychological well-being in the dance field, whether you are a dancer training within the sport or you are working as a professional in the field. We had the same experiences of this and thus expected that from the research participants' experiences as well. In order to avoid this bias as much as possible, we wanted to structure the interview questions in a broad way which would hopefully give the interviewee the space and freedom to speak from their personal perceptions and experiences, and not let our interview questioning style affect their thoughts on the topic.

3.3 Materials

Interviews were semi-structured, thus used open-ended questions to give the opportunity for the participants to speak freely about their personal experiences and perceptions on the topic, and bring up anything that might be related to the topic or the questions that they had come across during their careers. The interview questions were divided into four major sections, which included firstly Rath and Harter's (2010) five elements of well-being to help the participants to reflect first on their overall well-being in these areas. A sample question for elements of well-being was: "do you like what you do and how you spend your time daily, considering your work well-being"? The next section got more in depth with the participants'

reflection on the experiences of their psychological well-being working in the dance industry, for example, “what factors do you perceive as challenging or supporting to psychological well-being in the dance industry”? The next section focused on coping techniques they had acquired and practiced along the way to overcome psychological challenges, if any, for example, “do you have any knowledge or personal experience of different coping measures”? Finally, the last section aimed to examine the participants’ views on the current state of psychological well-being for people working in the dance industry in Finland. A sample question for this last section of perceptions of current state was: “Based on your own experiences, how do you perceive the current state of psychological well-being to be in the dance field?” All the questions were structured according to the aim of gaining a proper insight and finding answers to the research questions of the thesis.

3.4 Procedure

There were initially seven professional dancers who were contacted online individually with the inquiry of the possibility to be wanting to participate in this research, and six out of the seven who were contacted responded affirmatively to the inquiry. Subsequently, these six participants were sent an individual email including the consent form to participate in the research and an inquiry considering the point of time for conducting the interview. Interviews were set for February 2023, and they were conducted for the participants individually, five of them through an online platform (Zoom) and one of them in person, with both two researchers. The participants were informed of the topic of the interview and the ethics of the research in the consent form in order for them to already reflect on their experiences and perceptions in advance to the interview to feel more prepared. The same information was provided briefly to the participants in the beginning of the interview. One of the researchers was the interviewer and the other was the observer. These interviews lasted from 50 to 60 minutes, and they were all audiotaped with the consent of the participants.

3.5 Data analysis

Since we wanted to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of professional dancers' psychological well-being, we used thematic analysis the descriptive nature of this study. This method made it possible for identifying patterns in our data, and later interpreting the meanings of the similarities and differences that came up in the participants answers.

After the interviews the data was transcribed, carefully familiarized with, and coded into general, wide themes that we call areas in the result section according to the areas of our interests showing in the interview questions, then a bit smaller, more specific themes, and finally subthemes or subcategories, mostly risen from the data. These themes were modified and edited during the writing process according to our interpretation. (Braun et. Al, 2016)

3.6 Ethical considerations

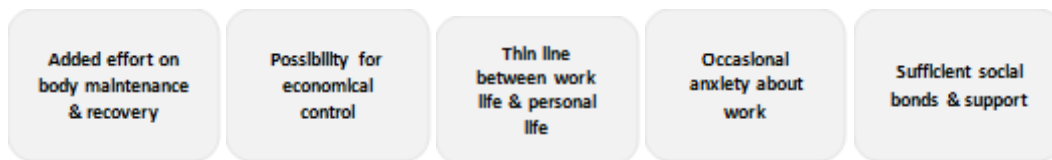
First we needed to acknowledge that we were studying a sensitive topic with a relatively restricted group of possible candidates for whose lives the possible exposing of identity might have an impact, so we paid careful attention to keeping the participants' anonymity. In addition, all the material will be disposed of after the thesis process. Informed consent was collected from all the participants. Our position as researchers making interpretations of the data with our own experience, knowledge and values, and their impact in different phases has been considered and acknowledged throughout the process. (Palmer, 2016)

4 RESULTS

Each interview area and their most common themes and subcategories based on the participants' responses are next presented and explained. In addition to the main commonalities, some individual insights provided by the participants, that we as researchers considered interesting and relevant to the research topic, are also included.

The participants were asked to define psychological well-being and what it means for them personally. The main gathered definitions, which were shared amongst all the participants in different forms of expressions, were *the balance between physical and psychological well-being, autonomy in a sense of being in control of oneself considering matters such as emotions, thoughts, and actions, and the ability to live with yourself and what is individual's view on themselves both on the outside and the inside.*

4.1 Perceptions of well-being



This area explored the perceived current state of different aspects of well-being in the participants' personal lives. These aspects included reflection on one's work life, social, economical, physical, and environmental well-being. The most common themes in this area, illustrated above, were *added effort on body maintenance and recovery, sufficient social bonds and support, possibility for economical control, thin line between work life and personal life, and occasional anxiety about work.* The participants experienced a need for more focus to be put onto getting enough rest and recovery for the body to keep continuing to be functioning and performing well considering many have very physical tasks in their work. They perceived

themselves to have strong relationships both within and outside of their work environments, which made them feel loved and supported. Possibility for personal economical control was currently experienced amongst the participants and they felt like they were at quite good places in their lives. A thin line between one's work life and personal life was experienced as a matter that was at times challenging to navigate through due to those two different aspects easily blending, which does not necessarily leave enough space for free-time and activities not related to their work. Anxiety about work was also occasionally experienced by the participants due to the limited number of work opportunities provided in the field and the fragmentary nature of them.

Added effort on body maintenance and recovery

Five of the participants shared a personal hope for added effort on body maintenance and recovery. They emphasized the importance of taking care of one's body, especially in professional dancers' profession where their body is their main working tool, but they also acknowledged the insufficient time and care they were putting on this matter, as the following quote exemplifies: *"It is not as constant, taking care of your body, even though it should be a priority."* (D5) Another participant reflected on the same importance of recovery and body maintenance: *"Well first of all your body is your working tool. You need to take care of it. And I, myself, am really bad at that."* (D6) It was also mentioned that taking care of one's body can be challenging due to the work environment and the conditions in which professional dancers often have to live in, which can be quite straining for the body: *"It is kind of difficult to get that kind of rest for the body that it requires, when the working stroke and the working hours are what they are."* (D2)

Sufficient social bonds and support

Five of the participants talked about experiencing to have sufficient social bonds and support in their lives. They perceived to have strong support systems outside of their profession e.g., family, friends, and significant others, and they had also gained close relationships both through dance training and working within the sport. It was mentioned how much dancing brings people together: *“Dancing, or this profession, being a professional dancer, it unites so much, the profession, that it builds up very close and long-lasting friendships.”* (D6)

Possibility for economical control

All six of the participants discussed having the possibility for economical control in their personal lives. They were currently in a good position considering working possibilities and sustaining financial situations, as seems evident from the following quote: *“I feel like, kind of, that I’m able to maintain the living standards that I want at the moment.”* (D2)

Occasional anxiety about work

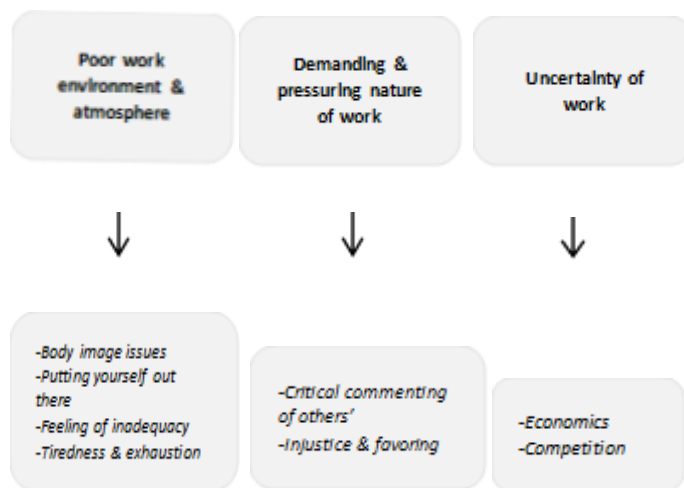
Even though the participants experienced to have the ability to control their economics, four of them had been also recently experiencing occasional anxiety about work. Either experiencing the anxiety through people around them, also working in the dance field, or through own personal experiences, the almost continuous uncertainty of work opportunities in the dance field had created concerns according to some of the participants: *“It is like that, when you have a constant anxiety about whether you’re going to get a job, that it is like can I, for example next month, afford to buy something in addition to the basic needs.”* (D2)

Thin line between work life and personal life

Three of the participants talked about experiencing a thin line between their work life and personal life, and the difficulty of separating those two aspects from one another. Due to

there being a passion for dance and having it have been a major part of one's life for a long time, and then it also becoming a responsibility and a profession, it could be quite challenging to differentiate work settings from one's free time and personal matters when working within something you love. Dancing was commonly considered as a lifestyle by the participants, which could make it difficult to think of it as work: *"This (dance) is a lifestyle, so how do you differentiate it, like that this is work now?"* (D3)

4.2 Factors challenging psychological well-being



This area examined the factors that the participants had experienced or perceived to create challenges for dance professionals' psychological well-being. The most common themes in this area, illustrated above with their subcategories, were *uncertainty of work*, *demanding and pressuring nature of work*, and *poor work environment and atmosphere*. Uncertainty of work was experienced through the instability that the work nature in the dance field creates for individuals' economics and also competition of work opportunities, which makes it challenging to even get to work when there are so many people wanting the same thing but only a few who are able to get it. Work in the dance field was perceived to be often demanding and pressuring, which led to different challenges on one's psychological well-being, such as experiencing body

image issues, continuously giving your all to perform perfectly, having feelings of not being good enough, and feeling overall tired and exhausted. One major challenging factor was experienced to be having to work in a negative environment and atmosphere. Work conditions such as these can be created when people are commenting one another's performance and personalities in a critical and a malicious way, and injustice through e.g., favouring and poor treatment from co-workers are overlooked.

Uncertainty of work

Four of the participants discussed the uncertainty of work. This factor was caused mainly by the fragmentary nature of work that is usually provided in the dance field, exemplified by this quote: *"Well maybe generally the uncertainty in this field, that the continuity of the work, that it is so fragmentary."* (D6) Another aspect mentioned by one of the participants was that there is a need to always be ready to work but at the same time, there might not be any work provided: *"(...) the work comes up very short notice, that you should always be available. But then again, it is possible that you don't have any work."* (D5)

One of the subcategories for the theme of uncertainty of work was economy. All six of the participants discussed the stress that economical instability had created. It was considered to be one of the main challenging factors for dance professionals' psychological well-being, exemplified by one of the participants' responses: *"Livelihood can be very fragmentary in nature, which really can be quite stressful and agonising, so I see that it is, the economical concern, most definitely the biggest challenging factor."* (D1) This same theme was discussed by two participants more specifically from a freelancer's point of view. They experienced high amounts of uncertainty and irregularity in their work, which required a considerable amount of anticipation of personal economics and strict usage of funds. Work life as a freelancer can be very comprehensive, which was reflected by one participant:

"It is maybe hard to separate the work life from the so-called normal life. I see it as a quite... It is comprehensive. Somehow, because you're a freelancer, you need to consider those work opportunities and apply a lot. It is sort of fragmentary." (D6)

Another subcategory for this theme was competition within the dance field, which was mentioned by four of the participants. There are a number of people searching for work opportunities and only a limited number of people chosen for those opportunities which are provided, thus creating pressure and high levels of competition amongst people working in the dance field, as described by one participant in the following quote: *"I mean, the world of dance... First of all, it is full of competition. It is horrific how big the competition can be in this field and the way people lurk over each other, it's horrific."* (D3)

Demanding and pressuring nature of work

Five of the participants experienced demanding and pressuring nature of work to be a great challenging factor for psychological well-being. There is a considerable amount of pressure to work long hours, sometimes even at unreasonable times, and meet all the high demands and expectations that have been set for a perfect performance. There are many aspects you need to do well in, which were reflected in one participant's response:

"For stress, there are many things that can bring the pressure and the stress. Can you learn fast enough? Are you good enough? Can you perform what you need to as well as you can if there's a live broadcast? There, you have only that once dance and it needs to go perfectly." (D5)

This theme of demanding and pressuring nature of work had several subcategories, of which the major one that was discussed by five of the participants was body image issues. Body

image issues and pressures were quite common for professional dancers, which were due to the previously mentioned high demands and expectations. These apply, in addition to the performance, also to the looks of an individual: *“You should always be in top shape, both looks-wise and skill-wise.”* (D5) These issues and pressures could affect not only the professional dancers’ training habits but their eating habits as well. Expectations for professional dancers’ physical appearance can create anxiety to the individuals related to their nutritional intake, which was experienced by one of the participants: *“How much can you eat so that you look when you dance, brings kind of more layers into the physical well-being matter.”* (D2)

One of the subcategories for this theme was putting yourself out there, which was mentioned by four of the participants. This related to the overall expectations that dance professionals should meet, such as challenging work conditions and hours, short notice work offers, and high levels of competition. Often times, especially in forms of artwork, these expectations also include expressing your inner self, thoughts, and emotions to the public, which were discussed as possibly challenging for some: *“If I think about all of the artwork, I consider it to require kind of strong psychological capacity if you have to dig a lot from your own experiences and emotions.”* (D1)

Another subcategory, discussed by four of the participants, was the feeling of inadequacy within their profession. One factor influencing this feeling of inadequacy was competition. In situations where one had put a lot of effort into getting a work opportunity and then it going to someone else, as reflected in this following quote: *“Why didn’t I get this (work)?”* (D4) This way of thinking could easily make the individual question their capabilities and worth in their field of work. This kind of questioning of self could occur even in situations where one does get the work opportunity that they were seeking, which was brought up by one participant: *“I don’t value myself the same kind of way that I do these other people, and then you can easily end up having to constantly prove yourself, sort of like that I deserve, do I deserve to be here.”* (D2)

Last subcategory for this theme was tiredness and exhaustion, which again was perceived as a challenging factor by four participants. Due to the challenging work conditions, environments, and hours, which have been previously mentioned, tiredness and even exhaustion could be sometimes quite commonly experienced: *“I’ve been so tired because all of the work, that I feel like I haven’t been able to rest properly to get rid of all of the tiredness”*. (D5)

Poor work environment and atmosphere

Five of the participants brought up the theme of poor work environment and atmosphere as being largely challenging psychological well-being in the dance field. As a professional dancer the salary is not in balance with the effort and demands of the work, and there can be overall quite poor performance within the direction or the procedures of a production. In addition, one major aspect in this which are people in the work environment who create a negative atmosphere, challenged psychological well-being. Lack of good-spirited co-workers and employers, and a positive work atmosphere, decreased psychological well-being tremendously according to the participants: *“But if that atmosphere (encouraging and positive) is not around you and you don’t experience getting that, it weakens your condition so much that you are like ready to give everything up.”* (D3)

One subcategory for this theme of poor work environment and atmosphere was critical commenting of others’, mentioned by two of the participants. This commenting could originate from e.g., employers and co-workers. Critical comments, especially when not provided in a constructive manner, could create a lot of doubt for the individual receiving them: *“If you get a lot of comments, like you’re bad or like so, sort of like corrections, then surely this affects you directly, like OK, I can’t do anything.”* (D2) Sometimes the comments could even be directed towards the individual themselves, and not their performance. This could create challenges

when e.g., a professional dancer is trying to separate their dancer identity from their personal identity, because of the confusing mixture of getting critical comments about both their performance and their own being:

“And often the comments can be directed towards you as a human being and a person, and not your dance. Or then if it’s towards your appearance or weight or just somehow about your personality, or things of these sorts.” (D2)

Another subcategory for this theme, discussed by three of the participants, was injustice and favouring. This was discussed both in the context of work and training settings. In work settings, this was experienced as happening through having very small circles of dance professionals where the same few people always get the most out of the work opportunities provided, even though there are a number of other talented individuals who would be very capable of performing well at that same opportunity, if they just were given the chance, as described in the following quote:

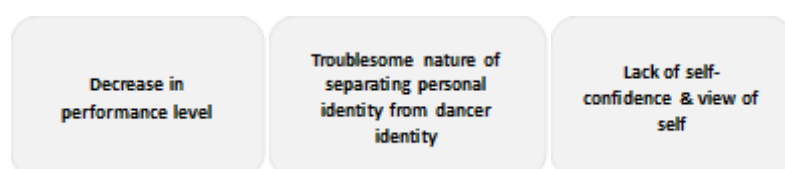
“Only due to the fact, because the competition is so hard, and the annoying thing in Finland is that it is such a small circle of people who are really doing it (work), but there would be a big circle of those who would want to do it. So, for one to be able to get to that tiny circle, it depends on who you know and who you are willing to suck up to.” (D3)

In training settings on the other hand, this was experienced through dance teachers or coaches not considering their dancers as individual people with their own interests and goals, but instead trying to mould them into the ideas they personally considered as the correct ones. This way of coaching was discussed by one of the participants:

“Maybe that sort of thing is something, when dancers are not being seen as individuals. Or like, it isn’t recognised, what is the thing that this specific dancer is interested in and which way they would like to take it (their dancing). Instead, they’re pushed to that general or own view of what they want to do or what for example can be currently seen more in Finland.” (D4)

One of the participants brought up the “*toxicity of the world of dance*” as a challenging factor for psychological well-being, which includes some of the previously mentioned aspects such as high levels of competition and small circles for work opportunities. This toxicity occurs not only in Finland but everywhere in the world, where people constantly watch over and judge one another in a critical and negative manner. There is also only a small circle or active operators but a huge circle of people wanting to do the same things, who are not easily able to get into that small circle. The probability of getting into that smaller circle depends on if one knows the right people and if one is willing to seek favour by flattering those certain people. Last aspect of this toxicity described by the participant was social media, which increases the competition between people in the dance field. Social media can also be a source of positivity and encouragement for one another, but it can also work as a “*poisoner of the human mind*”.

4.3 Perceived significance on well-being



This area focused on the perceived impacts that psychological challenges had on their well-being. Possible challenges that the participants had come across during their careers had created negative impacts on well-being, and the most common themes in this area, illustrated above, were *deficiency of performance, troublesome nature of separating personal identity from dancer identity* and *deficiency of self-confidence and view of self*. Deficiency of performance, self-confidence and view of self were all experienced as decreasing factors for psychological well-being, and these are closely related the previously mentioned theme of *Demanding and pressuring nature of work* under the headline 4.2 Factors challenging psychological well-being, in which the related subcategories were body image issues, feeling of inadequacy, and tiredness and exhaustion. Difficulties separating one's personal identity from their dancer identity was also perceived as influencing well-being, especially if issues or concerns of work consume the own life and identity of the individual.

Decrease in performance level

Deficiency of overall daily performance was discussed by two of the participants. They experienced the effect of personal psychological challenges to have impacted their daily functioning and well-being, especially from a psychological aspect, in a decreasing manner, as the following quote exemplifies: “*At that time (of experiencing a psychological challenge) I felt that my performance was, in fact, quite low and it was really difficult to work.*” (D1)

Troublesome nature of separating personal identity from dancer identity

Another theme discussed by two participants was the troublesome nature of separating personal identity from their dancer identity. They had experienced the challenges of trying to keep one's personal and occupational lives separate, when in truth, the occupational aspect very commonly overlaps the personal aspect, thus one might easily connect their dancer and

personal identity as one: *“I’ve had to go through the fact, that my personal identity is much more than just the dancer identity.”* (D5)

Lack of self-confidence and view of self

Deficiency of self-confidence and view of self was experienced as an effect on well-being by four participants. When facing psychological challenges in their personal lives, from the participants’ experiences, it can greatly impact one’s sense of self, self-confidence, and overall self-image, from both mental and physical aspect, in a negative manner. One participant reflected on their experience in the decrease of self-confidence from a physical appearance aspect due to psychological challenges: *“It has taken away self-confidence that I haven’t dared to do things, because what if someone sees that I look like this?”* (D4)

4.4 Factors supporting psychological well-being



This area examined the factors that the participants had experienced or perceived to support their psychological well-being. The most common themes in this area, illustrated above with their subcategories, were *strong social bonds and people, dancing, and safe and*

secure work environment. Having close relationships and supportive people both in one's work life and personal life was experienced as a great support for psychological well-being. Dancing itself was perceived as a major help in coping and overcoming psychological challenges. The participants felt joy and privilege due to the fact that they were able to work within the thing that they are passionate about and which they love to do the most, which is dancing. They perceived a safe and secure work environment to be of support considering psychological well-being. To create this environment, according to the participants, it is important for everyone involved to be encouraging and supportive of one another and have a genuine desire to hear what other people have to say.

Strong social bonds and people

Four participants discussed the theme of strong social bonds and people. They perceived that having strong relationships and good people in one's surroundings is a major factor supporting psychological well-being. Having strong connections and social bonds was experienced within the dance community especially: *"I think there are lots of great, lovely people. It's pretty, or I feel like I've found quite a lot of good people, sense of community."*

(D4)

Subcategory for this theme was sufficient outside source and peer support, brought up by three of the participants. This was explained as the perception of having enough support in one's personal life by loved ones, and also in work life by co-workers and colleagues. The importance of work life support and co-workers was brought up in the interviews:

"Often, it is really important to have those co-workers who do the same thing as you do. That those people are not in that project in an authority position, but they're those who are in the same position as you, so to say. Their support." (D6)

Dancing

Dancing was a theme that was mentioned to be a supporting factor by four participants. The sport itself was experienced as being a great source of help in challenging times of one's personal life: *"I feel, that in those situations of psychological challenges, that I've gone through, dancing has helped greatly in those situations."* (D1)

In addition to mentioning the importance of the sport, dancing, itself, one of the participants discussed the significance of music. They brought up the three most essential things that have been of the most support and help for them in difficult times: *"But dancing. Dancing was the saviour in this (exhaustion, burnout) as well. Music, dancing, and people."* (D3)

Safe and secure work environment

Safe and secure work environment, mentioned by two of the participants, was brought up as a supporting factor for psychological well-being. When everything functions in a work environment and everyone feels like they are considered to be an important part of the production and taken care of, that was perceived to increase one's psychological well-being by the participants and reflected in the following quote by one of them:

"That kind of safe work environment. It is important in this sort of artistic work, that every person in there feels like they are in a safe environment and that they can be themselves. That you know that you are respected, and you respect others and you're listened to." (D6)

One of the subcategories for this theme was an encouraging atmosphere, which was discussed by three participants. In contrast to previously discussed poor work atmosphere and critical commenting of others', an encouraging atmosphere begins from both the employers

and the employees, and it seeks to reassure everyone involved to feel motivated to come to work and perceive their surroundings to be secure. Encouraging atmosphere should be implemented in other settings as well, such as in dance schools and amongst their teachers, which was reflected by one of the participants: *“But if you encourage people to do those things that they want to do, then they will come up with those things.”* (D4)

Another subcategory for this theme, brought up by two participants, was listening skills in an employee-employer relationship. For a safe and secure work environment to exist, there needs to be a genuine desire from every party in a work relationship to listen to others’ perspectives and take their thoughts into consideration in addition to one’s own, as the following quote describes:

“(...) when you might be doing work that’s not necessarily for you... It’s not the thing that you would’ve liked to do but you’re doing it anyway. But if you’re listened to and considered as an equal, for example some director listens to you and takes your... Or a choreographer takes your opinion and thinks of it as relevant and important, that is kind of a boosting, positive thing.” (D6)

One participant discussed the recognition of the significance of their work to be a supporting factor. Sometimes one might question if their work is meaningful or if they are able to affect someone’s life in a positive way through their work. When experiencing these doubts, according to this one participant, it was quite important to see and realize that your work is needed and appreciated by people: *“Being able to see the audience reaction, that you can awaken emotions and experiences, and that brings again the joy of realizing that this work that you do matters too.”* (D6)

4.5 Coping skills



This theme explored on what kind of knowledge and experiences the dancers had on different coping techniques in general. All the participants were unsure of their knowledge of the topic in the beginning but were still able to name different coping techniques they had tried in the end. This indicated, and was in some of the interviews confirmed, that the dancers had not been instructed or taught about coping techniques in professional or educational dance environment during their careers. The work-related challenges the dancers reported needing coping techniques for have been elaborated more under the headline *4.2 Factors Challenging Psychological Well-being*, but some of the challenges mentioned in association with this context were challenges with professional identity, self-criticism and self-compassion, body image, experiences of exhaustion and injury, high-pressure situations such as auditions and performances, tolerating uncertainty and emotion regulation in situations typical with the dance industry such as rejection, feedback, failure and success.

Experiences of coping techniques in work-related challenges

First theme in this area was the dancers' overall experiences of coping and the techniques they had possibly tried before. All the participants mentioned discussion as an important coping measure that they all used. Some of the participants emphasized the significance of talking with colleagues, who share the same issues and understanding of the field, and some brought up the need to talk specifically with people outside the dance field to get perspective and support. All the participants also mentioned professional help in different

forms, such as therapy, to have been an important asset, whether it was an on-going process, or past or future wish to have professional support in challenging situations like mentioned above. Here is how one of the dancers answered, when asked how they had coped with the challenges encountered during their dancing career:

“Well, with the help of therapy, I've talked about things like eating and self-esteem, and that I have somehow disciplined myself by saying "I'm so bad" and scolded myself, so in therapy there has been a lot of talk about gentleness and through that like getting compassion towards myself and concrete tools like writing, which has worked for me, and in addition (to therapy), like talking with close people and sharing experiences, that's important.” (D6)

In addition to talking, the participants listed some physical coping techniques they have used. Some of them brought up meaningful activities and hobbies outside of dance and the importance of separating from thoughts related to work: *“Doing in general, that you do things you enjoy doing.” (D3)*, *“Kind of exactly the fact, that you get like your thoughts elsewhere.” (D2)*, *“Then I'll go for walks and try to breath so that's like... So you can somehow separate yourself (from the work)...” (D5)*

On the other hand, half of the participants also talked about the importance of dance itself when coping with difficult feelings or experiences as a way to express and process: *“...when you go to dance yourself often also helps so that you kind of... Get to the core yourself.” (D5)* One of the participants also mentioned “returning to yourself”, remembering who they are, what their strengths are and why they are practicing their profession: *“I'm doing this only because dance is my soul. I do love it.” (D3)*

Having a passion like this as a profession was mentioned to be challenging by some participants in the perspective of resources like money, time, and energy. They brought up the

challenges of saying no, pricing their services and prioritizing their time: “(...) *I’m getting into these things (jobs, projects etc.) heart first... It’s a little bad sometimes... You have to think if it’s worth it.*” (D5) Other coping techniques that two of the participants mentioned, were self-talk, activation and attitude in situations like auditions or stressful periods with a big workload:

“Well, yes, maybe also for yourself sometimes... or there is that kind of self-psyching that "I can do this" and "I know what I'm doing" and "I can get through this". And then, especially in auditions or test shoots, which I've been through numerous times, for me, that kind of coping mechanism is often that I go there maybe a little phlegmatic, relaxed, calm, and that's how I get that kind of peace.... Or maybe a thought like "well, I'm going to go over there and see what's going to happen", that I don't take it so seriously, or even if I take it seriously, but that I tell myself "well, this is just so nice, I will get a dance lesson, from this test dance", with that kind of attitude.” (D6)

Forms of support missing during careers

All the participants mentioned that they have experienced their own role and responsibility in getting support or help when they needed during their careers to be quite high. They told about examples like getting injured, burn out, missed opportunities for education to proceed in their careers, challenges in the work environment or getting guidance and encouragement. Some of them said they would have hoped to get more support from work structures like dance schools, theaters, or other employers. To inform about situations that might occur in the job and instruct to other professionals when something happens, or it seems to be otherwise needed. Next quote is from a participant, thinking back of an injury, that happened during job:

“(...)in hindsight, it would have been good if there had been someone like a sports psychologist, who would have been able to rationalize certain things and feelings (...) it would have been important to have been able to discuss those things with someone.”

(D5)

Getting help from different healthcare professionals such as doctors and therapists, and having insurances is the individual’s responsibility, and lack of knowledge or not being able to afford something or not being able to see their own situation objectively enough in time might lead to problematic or well-being threatening situations:

“Well, with the help of therapy, I’ve talked about things like eating and self-esteem, and that I have somehow disciplined myself by saying “I’m so bad” and scolded myself, so in therapy there has been a lot of talk about gentleness and through that like getting compassion towards myself and concrete tools like writing, which has worked for me, and in addition (to therapy), like talking with close people and sharing experiences, that’s important.” (D6)

Additionally, the training time during childhood and youth was reflected. One participant mentioned shortcomings in teaching and coaching such as lack of encouragement, and guidance as an individual, bringing own opinions or perceptions in the teaching in a strong or negative ways, and the impact of these shortcomings on psychological well-being and development in their dancing career:

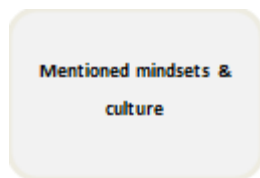
“Maybe the fact that they don’t see the dancers as individuals. (...) Or this kind of shading or mocking, bringing your own thoughts or your own so-called personal

negative opinions on other styles or ways of doing for example to the students or such direct commenting I have experienced.” (D4)

On the other hand, encouraging and personal attention from coach or teacher can be very big asset and support on one’s career that this participant would have hoped for more during their career: *“Maybe a little praising. This kind of support, like guidance. Where should I go, what could I do to get to the next level or something like this.” (D4)* Other participant also brought up the hope for more guidance and support in dance education:

“Somehow, that dance would also be seen as, in addition to an art form, as a sport, where there might come up challenges. That we would be guided more, kind of to the art side, that we would be taught practical things like... How to apply for a grant? How should you approach things? What kind of challenges can you face? Where can you get help if you need it, or like the physical aspect, that in order to possibly avoid certain accidents, you should train like this and eat like this, and somehow that there would be such information available.” (D5)

4.6 Perceptions of psychological well-being’s current state in Finnish dance field



The general perception of almost all the participants, five out of six, was that the overall situation “quite good”, but varies according to the work environments of particular jobs, such as resources of the employers: *“Now that I was in this bigger project, we had education lessons about topics like bullying and well-being. (...) A good producer understands the needs of their*

production crew.” (D3) Also differences according to the dance style or genre were mentioned. One participant talked about their experiences of the differences between ballet and modern dance, and the culture and attitudes within the genres:

“In contemporary dance, individuality is valued somewhat more, and in a way, ballet as a culture is really old-fashioned, in a way that change does not necessarily happen as quickly there as it does in the field of free dance.” (D2)

One of the participants on the other hand said they found the current situation in psychological well-being amongst dancers to be “very bad” and expressed their worry about the younger generation and for example the impact on social media:

“Well, I'm really worried about the psychological well-being of young people. Because it feels like today's world demands more and more and more... (...) ...and then the social media, which has poisoned the minds of young people. Such a hurry. People are in such a hurry.” (D3)

Half of the participants thought that the dancers’ psychological well-being is getting better through increasing acknowledgement of the importance of the topic, attitudes, and more open discussion culture: *“We are moving in the direction that, for example dancers dare to say something in a training situation, if they feel wronged in some way or experience unfair behavior.”* (D2) Four participants thought that discussion about well-being is already quite free with close colleagues and friends, but there is still work to do between different levels in the work environment:

“What I've seen when I've done actor's jobs is that it's changing there, that the dialogue even between the director and the actor is growing all the time. So I would hope that it is also coming to the dance field or there is already more, but if there is a choreographer and a dancer, the choreographer is in the position of authority, so maybe it is more difficult to open up there or about the psychological well-being and these difficulties than to a colleague. That it's a bit like it's getting better, but then there's still this sort of lack of speech. Generally maybe... Well, I don't know. I'm thinking generally the psychological well-being in the dance field, I'd say it's getting better so that people feel better.” (D6)

According to one dancer, the satisfaction to one's profession in the dance field could come from the fact that dancers have the opportunity to use their potential and express themselves:

“There are rarely those who really don't like their work or don't get to fulfill themselves, which I find to be quite central in terms of one's own well-being. So that's why I would like to say that the dancers have it quite good based on that.” (D1)

On the other hand, the societal level value of the arts and dance field came up a few times in various contexts during the interviews. The appreciation of the society, e. g. government and consumers, effects on for example the resources and job opportunities in the industry and through these the psychological well-being:

“(...) but I'm thinking about this like macro level thing, so what is the appreciation for dance like for example and how like... What kind of social discussion there is about dancing and the art field and like about the funding of art and what are they talking about so maybe that can affect someone (psychological well-being).” (D1)

One participant also brought up the issue of resources in the entertainment business, where dance can be used for example in performances. This can be seen in for example the practices such as salaries and hiring policies:

“(...)We (dancers) are still the gang that's the last to be booked, and that's paid with the money that's left, we're rarely the group that's primarily wanted and get paid a decent salary, after which they would see what else they can afford...” (D5)

In relations to the possible lack of funding and other resources, the competition in the field, as mentioned before, is a big factor when considering the psychological well-being of professional dancers in the industry, especially in a relatively small country like Finland: *“...this is such a small country that there are really limited job opportunities here, limited amount of people are used.” (D5)*

In dance as an aesthetic sport and form of art in addition to dancing skills, there are external factors like one's appearance that are taken into consideration for example when booking for jobs. As one of the participants described, this may also be hard on one's confidence and thus psychological well-being, and has a lot to do with the body image challenges, that were not foreign to any of the participants in this study:

“Well, I feel that if you really are the best, if you can define it that way, then yes, I believe that you have a lot of work, but it is also influenced by many other things, things that you cannot influence yourself and they are also often the heaviest to deal with.” (D4)

Existing mindsets in the dance field

When analyzing the data, we noticed that in several contexts during the interviews the participants mentioned thoughts and perceptions on how to manage with the challenges they face in the dance field, so we created a subcategory of these mindsets that seemed relevant to in a way describe the cultural atmosphere of the industry as a part of the current state. One of the participants talked about a “suffering artist” -stereotype, and how it might have an impact on their way of thinking:

“Somehow it feels to me that since I have been in the industry and maybe somehow mixing my way of thinking with this... That somehow I think that dance is supposed to be hard. In a way, suffering is part of it. (...) I don't think that a person should suffer terribly in order to make great art. But maybe somehow subconsciously I understand it that way.” (D2)

Two of the participants mentioned that the fear of getting labeled as a difficult person might be preventing free discussion of the shortcomings in the field:

“Maybe when it's between dancers or colleagues, they are more supportive and, kind of open, but then it feels like we still don't dare to be so open to those who are in a decision-making position or in authority, to open up those things to them in the same way then like among colleagues. That we are still somehow afraid that you will be labeled that you are difficult.” (D6)

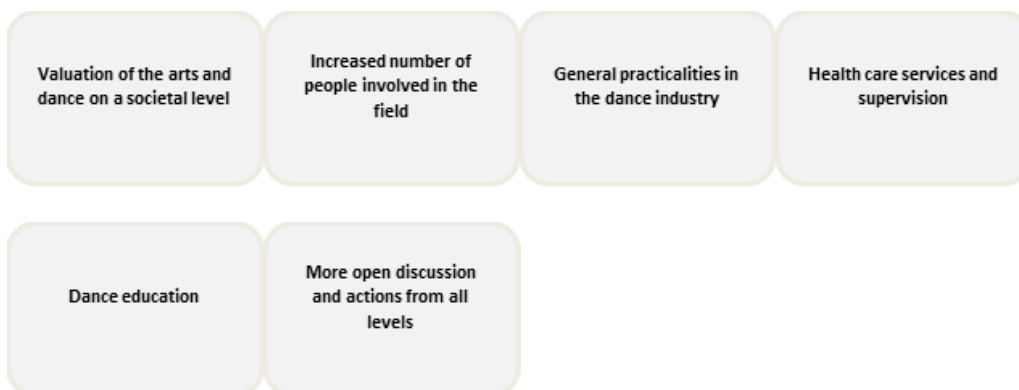
Also, one of the participants talked about the insecurity that the competitiveness might cause:

“In a way, a lot of people struggle with these things alone, when this is such a competitive field, then you don't want to show insecurity or think that others might see it as insecurity when... In a way, we want to get support or say that scared or anxious or whatever, I think it's a big problem that people don't want to show vulnerability.” (D5)

Another participant was talking about the same phenomenon and that the reluctance to show insecurity might show as unpleasant behavior towards colleagues that are inevitably competition on some occasions for the competitive nature of the industry: *“I have seen this sort of negative behavior that I think often comes from the fact that people are insecure or have problems with confidence.” (D4)*

Since the job opportunities are so limited dancers might prioritize jobs on the expense of their well-being: *“Because dancers are often in a vulnerable position, especially if there are young dancers, because they might do almost anything for a job. Then they just endure in the situation.” (D2)* So overall according to the interviews, we interpreted that in order to work in the dance industry one must have a strong psychological resilience: *“...you have to be kind of a badass.” (D3)*. In the next chapter we will go deeper into how the participants thought the situation could be improved in practice.

4.7 Dancers’ suggestions to improve their well-being



Under this area, we examined the participants' suggestions to improve their well-being, since they are the ones with experiences of the field. As said before, many of the participants thought the amount of open discussion was increasing: *"Well, I feel like it (psychological well-being) is a timely topic everywhere actually, so certainly among dancers as well, many struggle with the same things, whether they are professionals or aspiring professionals."* (D5) All of the participants still thought there is room for more talk, and some were hoping that the discussion between dancers and other levels would also increase and people in the management position would take more responsibility and actions making sure the dancers are well:

"Yes, I would say that it is absolutely necessary to start in a way like to build from the top down, so that the choreographers would speak up or take a stand or intervene in things in some way, or would bring awareness or go through some leadership training before they start, to be capable of the big role they have. And so the dancers would dare to speak and the kind of threshold would be removed, because of course, since it's about your own work, you don't want to be "that difficult dancer and then you won't be hired anymore" and that we would get rid of that kind of mentality." (D2)

Other wishes for the higher work structure level in addition to the safe discussion were attention on building trustful relationships in the work environment, listening, open and caring attitude, information available for everyone, more attention on the other aspects of the job than just the artistic input or people to take care of them specifically: *"That people who decide would maybe broaden their views a little and would come to this day kind of. And yes, by talking and listening. And with trust. That's how I believe we would get pretty far already."* (D4)

The dancers were also talking about getting more people in the field, that Finland as a relatively small country has quite closed group of people actively working on the industry and

there would be a lot more capable people to also create new possibilities to all the people on the field: *“...it runs in such a small circle. So I wish the doors would open more. That the doors would open, there would be more opportunities, because there are such talented people, such good dancers, so many choreographers, but where the hell are the jobs?”* (D3)

The general practicalities such as contracts, pay, hierarchy, supervision, and other structures were mentioned by many of the participants, and even though according to the dancers, there has been some improvement over the recent years, there could still be stronger structures that consider and support the dancers' well-being:

“But then maybe in the dance field collective agreements are few and far between. And then it feels like they're being stretched terribly. And often in artistic and cultural work, there aren't clear structures for how that work should be done and under what conditions, then maybe a more general discussion about these issues as well could help quite a lot, such as for the well-being at work.” (D1)

Five of the participants also mentioned the responsibility for one's well-being laying quite heavily on the individual, especially in the dancing field where the projects, employers and working environments change so frequently, so more supporting structure for well-being is welcome:

“In any case the employers change very often, for example in the last year, I've had four different employers, some of them have been longer-term, some shorter-term, so there's no time to develop like a longer relationship, so maybe that's what I would hope for, anyway, even though I've been here (in the business) for 16 years since I was seventeen, there's no one who's been with me all that time during my work who could have checked like "hey, where are we going" so maybe that kind of work supervision or something...

Something involving the work itself, but also kind of the psychological well-being.”

(D6)

For this one of the dancers was hoping for some sort of health care services, directed for the art field freelancers who might be very alone during their professional lives, that would enable a longer-term relationship with for example a well-being at work -professional with experience of the field, so that they would not be so alone with the reflection of their well-being, physical or psychological:

“Well, in my opinion, the fact that you set up a company where there is someone who has such psychological expertise in occupational well-being as a strength area, somehow, in my opinion, it would be good to offer similar services to even the smallest working communities, not to mention larger organizations, like theaters. And I think it would be good if it was an outside consultant...” (D6)

Two of the participants thought about the societal level's impact on the jobs as a dancer and how it affects the resources, conditions, and value, and thus the place, that arts and culture have in our society in Finland:

“I thought that even then, like the appreciation of dance, the appreciation of the arts, it is so culturally constructed that, in my opinion, it cannot be shaped by any prescribed actions, that it happens more organically. Of course, you could think about what kind of role media has in relation to dance. Especially if you think about the public media like something like Yle, how they present dance, the dance field, dancing, so that in a way they could use that power more, of course, in relation to it. And then these financial

questions, there are quite big factors like who is being funded? On what grounds? That's the kind of aspect that could be addressed by various concrete actions." (D1)

Finally one suggestion that a participant had was about how to possibly develop the dance education system to improve aspiring professional dancers' psychological well-being. They were hoping for more support and sharing more information for example about the support group that professional dancers benefit from having to avoid being left alone with issues, and to be able to see all the aspects that professional dancers need to take care of in order to optimally care for their well-being:

"To somehow bring up the dancers to the fact that, we are athletes and we need different support groups, and not so that the dancers survive pretty much alone whether it is physically or mentally, when the support of a professional could be good for everyone." (D5)

5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of dance professionals of their psychological well-being working in the dance field in Finland. The purpose was to especially explore the most common factors experienced to influence psychological well-being working in the field in a challenging and supportive manner, ways in which possible psychological challenges are coped with, and the perceptions of the current state of dance professionals' psychological well-being. The findings of this research are next discussed and compared to the previous literature on the topic which were presented in the literature review section of this paper.

There were various experiences and perceptions of factors challenging dance professionals' psychological well-being in this research. The dance field itself was perceived to be filled with pressure and high expectations, both internal and external, which can be extremely wearing for people work within it. Adam and colleagues' study (2004) on elite-level ballet dancers supports the results of this research that suggested dancers perceiving themselves to have had significant psychological pressure to perform regularly at a high level, which applies to other sports as well where athletes are expected to dedicate everything to their sport and to continuously maintain peak physical and psychological condition (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Smith, 2017). Working conditions were also described as commonly inconvenient and burdensome, and for there to be often only very inadequate time to use for personal recovery and rest. Just as other athletes are required to put all their time, energy and effort into their sport (Stephan & Brewer, 2007 as cited in Smith, 2017), dance professionals commonly have to meet these exact requirements which became evident in the findings of this research.

High levels of competition and critical comparison between dance professionals were commonly experienced in this research. Noh, Morris and Andersen's study (2002) on professional ballet dancers' greatest perceived stressors aligns in these findings, which suggest

in fact that dance directors' criticism and competition for roles are one of the greatest stress factors (Noh et al., 2002, as cited in Bryant, 2017). In addition, the cause that high levels of competition and a limited number of work opportunities provided in the dance field have on individuals' economical situation was perceived to be one of the greatest challenging factors for dance professionals' psychological well-being. The nature of dance field being pressuring, competitive, and critical of others, was perceived as a negative influence on oneself, specifically self-confidence and body image. This aligns with the previous findings of dancers often having perfectionistic tendencies where they set high standards for themselves and are easily critical of their own performance, which is quite understandable due to the expectations of near perfect or flawless performance for one to succeed (Nordin-Bates et al., 2017). Houlter, Wang, Qi, and Nelson's study (2018) also supports the fact that athletes with tendencies for high perfectionism, fear of failure, and contingent self-worth are more prone to different forms of psychological ill-being (Houlter et al., 2018).

Considering on the other hand the supporting factors, the ones that were especially described as supporting one's psychological well-being in this study were the strong social bonds that exist within the field and the support that is provided from other sources, such as family and friends, and also dancing itself. These are supported by the research findings of Murcia and colleagues' (2010) who found several positive emotional and physical effects as well as positively impacting dancer's self-esteem and social relations.

The findings in this research support the literature reviewed in this thesis and the assumptions that we, the researchers, had before the study was conducted. The assumptions were that psychological well-being of dance professionals would not have been and was not currently considered sufficiently enough in theory nor in practice, and that there are numerous factors that can cause challenges for an individual's psychological well-being working in the dance field. This strong connection between the pre-assumptions and the research findings makes it imperative that implementing actions towards dance professionals' enhanced

psychological well-being would be essential. Providing services of sport psychology experts to individual dance professionals, dance performance production groups, and goal-oriented dance teams, would be a beneficial direction that the dance field could take for the psychological well-being of dance professionals and individuals competing in the sport to increase and maintain better in the future. Starting from the beginning stages of dancers' careers when they are still training in the sport, just like Simons and Bird (2022) proved the positive effect of coach-athlete relationships and social support to create on individual well-being, it should be promoted right from the beginning how essential it is to experience sufficient support from one's social groups and to obtain a secure and encouraging coach-athlete relationship (Simons & Bird, 2022). The benefits and importance of recognizing and carrying out actions that support psychological well-being in the dance field, from dance schools to dance performance productions and competitive dance environments, would be to ensure an increased number of long lasting and favorable careers, enhanced performances, and positive experiences of work well-being amongst dance professionals.

5.1 Limitations and directions for future research

This research, like every study, has its limitations. Due to the research having been conducted with qualitative research methods and the sample having been purposely quite small to have the possibility to gain information regarding individual perceptions and experiences on the topic from each participant and include as much of the matters they discussed into the research, the findings cannot be generalized in Finland. Even though finding generalizable information on the topic was obviously not the purpose of this research and it aimed rather to explore individual experiences and perceptions, in order to increase more knowledge and gather the most accurate and more generalizable information on the psychological well-being of dance professionals in Finland, there needs to be more research conducted and on a larger sample. Gaining a broader range of experiences and perceptions

from as many different people as possible, coming from versatile backgrounds and life situations, would be important to make sure that there is enough data on the topic before the main commonalities could be derived.

Future research directions could consider conducting quantitative research in the Finnish dance field on dance professionals' psychological well-being and the current state of it within the field. It would be beneficial to get a greater overview of these topics in the form of quantitative reports in addition to qualitative reports, so that a more general state of these issues could eventually be drawn and a push towards positive actions aiming to improve the situation amongst these areas, if needed, could be initiated, and practically implemented. Future research could also benefit from exploring the experiences and perceptions of dance professionals' working in the field in higher positions, such as directors and managers, to view their perspectives on these issues as well.

5.2 Practical implications

Due to the topic of psychological well-being of dancers still being in its beginning stages as an area of research, we considered this research to be of importance to gain more information on this topic. Even though there is only limited existing research, including this study, we also thought it was essential to give this topic a platform and through this make it an even more current topic for general discussion. Our assumption before conducting the research was that psychological well-being of dancers was not taken into consideration and discussed publicly as much as it should, for it is an essential part of their overall well-being and work performance, and this assumption was supported by the findings of this research.

Our perception after this research is that this topic indeed is very important, and it needs an apparent public platform for it to be recognized, implemented, and evaluated more in the Finnish field of dance. People working in different positions in the dance field such as dancers, coaches, and managers, and also, us the researchers, as future professionals in the area of sport

psychology can learn this above-mentioned great importance of gaining more knowledge on psychological well-being, finding ways to increase it, and performing practices related to it to increase the current state. We all also learn that the psychological aspect of well-being can be in fact a huge factor in professional dancers' perceptions of their overall well-being and that this could affect their performance in a negative manner. In addition, the suggestions provided by the participants of this study can hopefully function as possible guidelines and inspiration for changes that should occur and which actions should be taken for the direction of the psychological well-being of dance professionals in Finland to improve.

5.3 Conclusion

This research showed that the environment that professional dancers are often required to work in, can be extremely demanding and filled with internal and external expectations and pressure. Different aspects such as poor work conditions and overall atmosphere, receiving negative commenting from others, and living with a constant worry about one's livelihood due to high levels of competition and limited number of fragmentary work opportunities, that can create major challenges for individuals considering psychological well-being in addition to their physical well-being. In contrast, there are aspects such as dancing itself, strong relationships within and outside the dance industry, and being able to work in a secure environment, that can work as a supporting factor for these same individuals. Using different coping techniques that work the most efficiently for each individual, such as processing personal thoughts and experiences verbally, and using encouraging and positive self-talk, can play in addition a great supporting role for professional dancers' psychological well-being.

Although the situation related to the acknowledged importance of psychological well-being was found to have been improving in the dance field in the form of more frequent discussion on the topic, it was evident that more needs to be done for the situation to become better. Especially, there needs to be actions taken in practice more and this movement of taking

actions has to begin with the people in the higher position levels in the dance field. Once psychological well-being and its importance is recognized more on these higher levels, more action and practical implications will take place in the future, which will improve the situation.

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APPENDIX 1. Research permit request

We are studying Sport and Exercise Psychology in the University of Jyväskylä's international Master's program (Psychology of Physical Activity, Health and Well-being) at the Faculty of Sport Sciences. Our studies include a Master's thesis, which we are now doing on the subject of professional dancers' experiences and views regarding their psychological well-being. The purpose of our study is to find out what experiences professional dancers have with factors that support and challenge their psychological well-being, what techniques they use to manage stress, and what is the perception of people working in the dance industry in Finland about the current state of the field, related to the psychological well-being of dancers, and the timeliness of the topic in the field. Conducting our thesis research, we will have interviews with people who dance as a profession. The themes of the interview are the different aspects of well-being, the factors that support and challenge it, coping techniques, and the state of mental well-being of professional dancers.

In accordance with research ethics guidelines, we remove identifying information from the material so that the interviewees are not identified based on our study. We record the interviews on our phones behind a password. Afterwards, we will transcribe the interviews, and keep them behind our password-protected computers. We will keep the data for as long as our thesis is ready, after which we destroy it and the interviews we recorded. As researchers, we are bound by the confidentiality of the personal information we receive and use it in our research report only as pseudonyms (identification information removed).

You can stop the study at any time by notifying us. We will be happy to answer any questions that arise on the subject. Our contact informations are at the bottom.

The subject's signature and identification of consent to participate and to use the interview as previously described:

Kind regards,

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APPENDIX 2. Interview questions

Background

- Tell me a little about your dance background!
 - When did you start dancing?
 - Do you have training as a dancer?
 - What kind of different roles have you worked in the field of dance? At the moment?
 - > What kind of things does your job consist of/has it consisted of?
 - How long have you worked in the field?
 - Which dance genres/styles have you worked with in your career?
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Views on well-being:

- Well-being consists of many different components that influence each other: What are your experiences/views of the following areas of well-being (Rath & Harter) --> how does it look/how does it feel?
 1. Work life: are you satisfied with what you do and how you spend your time every day?
 2. Social well-being: is there love, strong and lasting relationships in life?
 3. Financial well-being: an opportunity for rational management of financial life?
 4. Physical well-being: how do you feel about your own health and do you have enough energy to take care of daily chores?
 5. Well-being of the living environment: opportunities for participating in things and doing them brought by your own residential area?
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Experiences of factors that support and weaken psychological well-being in the dance industry

- What is psychological well-being: how would you define it? (WHO, Mental well-being: consideration of one's own abilities, management of everyday stress, ability to work effectively and socialize)
 - Can you name factors that weaken psychological well-being in the dance industry? (from the whole career; hobbyist --> professional) Which do you think is the most influential of these factors and why?
 - Can you name factors that support psychological well-being in the dance industry? Which of these factors do you think is the most influential and why?
 - Have you experienced psychological challenges during your career, if so what?--> Have you experienced these challenges affecting your well-being? How?
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Experiences of coping techniques

- Do you have knowledge / experience of different survival techniques? (e.g. stress management)
 - If you have experienced psychological challenges, how have you coped with them?--> Have you used certain methods?
 - Have you had external support in challenging situations, if so, what kind?
 - What kind of support would you have liked to have received?
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Perceptions about the general state of the mental well-being of professional dancers in Finland and ideas for improvement

- Will there be talk of mental well-being in discussions among professional dancers?
- How do you see the current state of mental well-being of professional dancers working in Finland based on your own experience/those close to you?
- Do you have any development ideas / thoughts on how to improve the situation, if necessary?