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## QUALITATIVE STUDY

# Professional ballet dancers' experience of injury and osteopathic treatment in the UK: A qualitative study

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**Summary Objectives:** Professional dancers suffer significant musculoskeletal injuries during the course of their careers. Treatment-seeking behaviour is important in all patient populations, yet is rarely investigated amongst professional dancers. This qualitative study aimed to form a better understanding of how dancers decide to seek treatment, and in particular to explore their experiences of receiving osteopathic care for their injuries.

**Methods:** A qualitative study design using grounded theory was used as a methodological framework for data collection and analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore professional dancers' experience of injury and decision-making to seek professional health-care.

**Results:** Five themes were constructed that explain and describe dancers' experience of injuries and their views and perspectives of treatment, these were; the growing dancer, the fear factor, learning to cope, effective treatment, and returning autonomy.

**Conclusion:** The personal development of each dancer consisted of an amalgam of internal and external pressures. These pressures combine with experiences of pain and injury to influence a dancer's decision-making behaviour when injured and deciding to seek treatment. The study also provide factors relevant in the effective treatment of dancers, and outlined participants' preference for a global physical approach to assessment and treatment of their musculoskeletal pain.

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## Introduction

Few professional ballet dancers escape pain and injury during their careers, with epidemiological studies placing injury rates between 55% and 90% (Thomas and Tarr, 2009). The *Dance UK* organisation works with and represents the dance industry in the UK, including a focus on the health of dancers (Dance UK, 2016). Dance UK's 2002 study reported that 60% of dancers seek help when injured, and listed physiotherapy, osteopathy and chiropractic amongst the treatments used (Laws, 2005). This study, also showed that osteopathy was used by 18% of participants, representing a 29% reduction in uptake of osteopathic care services compared to the earlier study published in 1996 (Brinson and Dick, 1996).

Little is known however of the treatment-seeking behaviour of dancers, and alongside quantitative epidemiological research into dance-related injuries (Jacobs et al., 2012), qualitative research can help understand the individual dancer's lived experience of their pain, injuries and treatment in the context of their social world (Petty et al., 2012a,b). Qualitative research in the field of dance related injuries has enabled a rich description of recognised factors relevant to dance injury such as the stigma of being injured (Macchi and Crossman, 1996), the effects of injury on identity (Wainwright and Turner, 2006) and the fear of being misunderstood by healthcare practitioners (Shah, 2008). An understanding of these factors has contributed to a better knowledge of the motivations and attitudes of dancers in seeking treatment for musculoskeletal injuries.

This study aimed to explore the decision-making processes of dancers in seeking treatment for musculoskeletal pain. In particular, the aim was to develop a better understanding of dancers decisions to seek osteopathic treatment within their psychosocial framework.

## Methods

In line with recent initiatives to adhere to mandatory reporting guidelines for publishing in the rehabilitation literature (Chan et al., 2014), the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) (Tong et al., 2007) are used to describe our methods.

This study formed part of the lead author's (TPS) Masters of Osteopathy (M.Ost) course requirements at the British School of Osteopathy (BSO), and the BSO research and ethics committee (BSOREC) granted ethical approval. A qualitative study design was used as there is little existing research into dancers' experiences of injuries and subsequent treatment seeking decision-making. Qualitative research recognises the individuality of participants' perspectives and experiences of pain and injury and could explore and understand them in a rich and contextual manner (Petty et al., 2012a,b). Semi-structured interviews were used with participants, and Grounded Theory Method (GTM) was used as a framework by which to collect, analysis and conceptualise data (Charmaz, 2014).

## Participants

Dancers with a minimum experience of one year in a professional ballet company and who experienced an injury

and had received osteopathic treatment were invited to take part in the study. Advertisements were placed on the website of the British Association of Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM) and professional ballet companies in the UK were asked to aid in recruitment. Interested individuals were also asked to aid in recruitment of further participants by way of 'snow ball' sampling (Coyne, 1997).

Potential participants were contacted by email and given details of the study. Appropriate arrangements were then made for the interviews to be carried out, and informed consent was gained from each participant before interviews commenced. Initially, participants were selected to present a wide range of ages, a mixture of the highest ranks they had attained within ballet companies, and a variety of exposure to osteopathic treatment. This purposeful sampling (Barbour, 2001) was employed to gain a wide initial view of the research topic. Following initial interviews and analysis, further participants were chosen for certain attributes such as the length of their ballet career, or greater experience of osteopathic treatment. This change in focus represented a switch to theoretical sampling (Coyne, 1997) in a response to data analysis, so that concepts could be explored and themes developed.

## Data collection

Face-to-face interviews were used to collect data, as they allowed flexible exploration of the meanings and realities of the participants constructed in relation to their experiences (Kvale, 2008). All interviews were conducted by TPS who is an osteopath and former professional dancer. Interviews were semi-structured, and based around a guide designed to prompt discussion of areas relevant to the study yet also with enough flexibility to allow *ad hoc* exploration of developing topics. Table 1 provides examples of interview questions which were used to explore participants' experiences of injury and seeking osteopathic care.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and sent to participants for 'member checking', which enhanced data credibility (Petty et al., 2012a,b).

In line with GTM, data collection and analysis occurred concurrently (Charmaz, 2014). The timeline of the study facilitated an iterative process where initial interviews were completed and analysed before further interviews were performed. Within this structure, the interview guide was revised where necessary to allow developing concepts to be explored. This allowed for greater exploration of topics of interest identified in earlier interviews (Charmaz, 2014) and assisted in the development and testing of the key findings.

## Data analysis

Data analysis (conducted by TPS) began with reading and re-reading interview transcripts and then line-by-line coding segments of data (interview text) that yielded concepts of relevance and interest in the research questions and aims (Charmaz, 2014). These initial codes were compared within and between participants and developed using summary tables and diagramming (Charmaz, 2014) so that a thematic model could be developed. Hypotheses were generated from this process and were integrated into

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