



Safeguarding and Abuse Prevention: Research findings 2021

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Dance activity offers an opportunity to enhance physical, psychological, spiritual and social health. Anyone who dances should be able to experience these benefits free from abuse. Safeguarding/abuse prevention activities help everyone to take responsibility for these goals.

All of us want to support the wellbeing, health and best outcomes of every person who dances. When reports of mental health crises, or allegations of abuse, hit the headlines, it is inevitable that we ask ourselves what we could have done to prevent such tragedies and work to ensure such incidents could not happen in our own organisations. While this individual reflection and action is crucial, One Dance UK believes that safeguarding is the responsibility of all organisations within the dance sector, regardless of their size, genre, or targeted age group.

	Frequency	Percent
Organisation		
Governed	28w	40.00
Non-governed	42	60.00
Geographical Location		
England	66	94.4
Scotland	2	2.8
Wales	1	1.4
No Response	1	1.4
Number of Dancers		
0-30	8	11.4
31-50	7	10.0
51-100	14	20
101-200	16	22.9
201-More	25	35.7
Designated Safeguarding Lead		
Yes	59	84.3
No	6	8.6
No Response	5	7.1

Table 1: Characteristics of Dance Organisations
 Note: Non-governed dance organisations are independent from the government (e.g., private dance school, non-accredited vocational dance school).

Surveying the Sector

Together with the University of Birmingham, the National Institute of Dance Medicine and Science (NIDMS), and the international safeguarding group Personal Safety in Dance, One Dance UK recently conducted the first national survey of safeguarding and abuse prevention in UK dance organisations. The survey was developed with input from experts in private, vocational, FE, HE, and professional settings and explored the perceptions and understanding of a broad range of safeguarding/abuse prevention issues, from mental health and equality, diversity, and inclusion to unsafe dance practice, anxiety, and harassment. The study also explored current practice and challenges faced by dance organisations. This research will form the foundation for better safeguarding and abuse prevention support and advice for UK dance organisations.

Individuals from 70 organisations completed the online survey; see Table 1 for information on the participant organisations.

Key Findings

Training

Staff training is a key safeguarding/abuse prevention strategy that can also help to proactively change the culture of organisations that enabled abuse to occur (Pike et al., 2011). Encouragingly, 94.8% of survey respondents had training for staff, with most occurring on an annual or semi-annual basis. However, most training was 3 hours or less, with only 11.1% receiving more extensive training.

What remains unclear is whether short courses are sufficient or whether multi-day training would lead to more knowledgeable and confident staff who are more likely to raise safeguarding alerts (Pike et al., 2011).

Awareness and practice

We identified three distinct cohorts with different development needs and opportunities.

26% felt that ALL 43 issues within the survey were within their remit and that they were at least partially addressing them. For these organisations, support to evaluate the efficacy of their current practice and to share their experience and approaches for the benefit of the sector would be beneficial.

28% felt that they were addressing all issues they believed were relevant, but not all 43 issues. For these organisations, support to perform a needs analysis, or a formal and systematic check of the needs of individuals and the organisation as a whole, would help identify whether any issues that are relevant to their dancers are currently being missed and, if so, how to address them.

46% felt that they were not currently addressing all issues that they felt were relevant. For these organisations, appropriate support for training and policy development to ensure that they are addressing all issues effectively would be beneficial.

Specific safeguarding and abuse prevention issues

The most addressed safeguarding/abuse prevention issues were (see Figure 1):

- Dance-specific concerns (e.g., injury, unsafe dance practices, over-stretching)
- Psychological issues (e.g., low self-confidence, anxiety)
- Equality, diversity and inclusion issues (e.g., gender discrimination, racism, sexism).

Almost every organisation agreed that low self-confidence was both within the organisation's responsibility to address and being addressed. Nurturing and supporting dancers to develop their confidence and self-esteem may mean they will be less vulnerable to abuse and mental health problems as well as help them to achieve performance-related goals.

The least addressed safeguarding/abuse prevention issues were (Figure 2):

- Chemsex (having sex under the influence of psychoactive drugs; most common among men who have sex with men)
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Psychological issues (e.g., low self-confidence, anxiety)
- Alcohol abuse

Figure 1. Most addressed safeguarding and abuse prevention issues

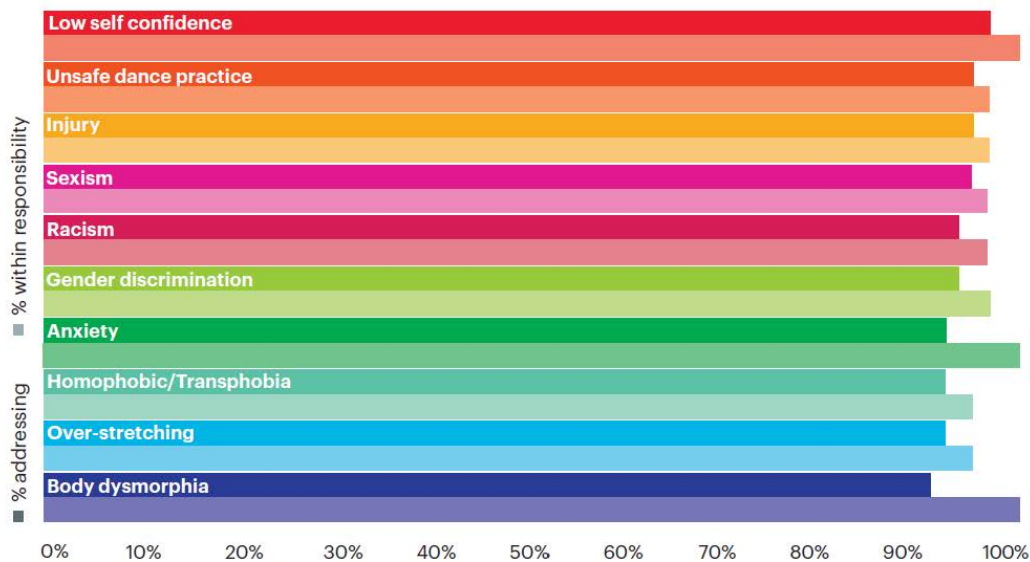
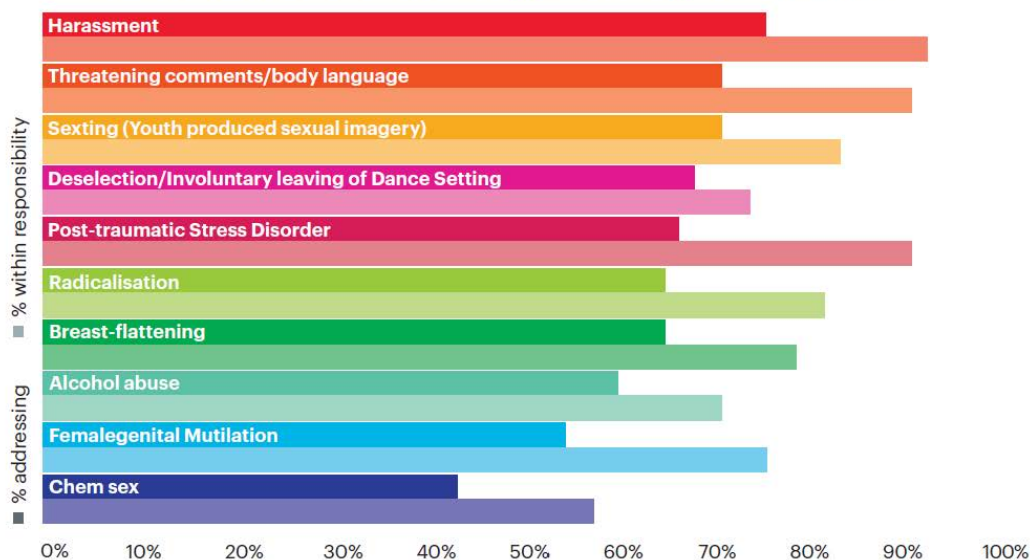


Figure 2. Least addressed safeguarding and abuse prevention issues



The lack of focus on these important issues may be due to the demographics of the dancers at an organisation but may also reflect a lack of awareness of prevalence or severity of these issues. For issues such as FGM, radicalisation, and harassment, the perceived relevance is high but the numbers addressing the issue are relatively low. This is concerning because all organisations that work with children, young people, and adults at risk have a statutory duty to protect them from harm. Keeping dancers safe from these risks should be approached in the same way as safeguarding them from any other risks (see www.learning.npcc.org.uk). More work is needed to better understand the specific challenges faced by organisations in addressing these complex safeguarding/abuse prevention issues so that more appropriate support can be put into place.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The first National Survey of Safeguarding/Abuse Prevention in UK Dance Organisations provides a snapshot of the sector, both in terms of areas of strength and needed improvement. The results will form a baseline to measure future progress against and play a role in continued conversations about how to improve safeguarding and abuse prevention in dance. However, it is important to note that organisations that respond to a survey about safeguarding are likely to be those who already prioritise these issues.

It is likely, therefore, that this survey overestimates the extent of compliance with safeguarding policies and good practice in the sector as a whole.

We are currently writing a detailed report and are planning opportunities for the sector to share their views and experiences and shape recommendations. It is clear that further work is needed to ensure that safeguarding/abuse prevention policies and procedures are widely and consistently embedded. By engaging with this important work in the future, all dance organisations can help make dance a safe and welcoming environment for all.

References

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