

ADPA6000/C

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Independent project Research journal

Research, ideas, notes & logbooks

Maisie Jacka

A few questions I want to answer throughout this piece

Does dance improve mental health or ruin it?

Why do students commit suicide?

What are the main reasons behind suicide rates?

Is dance a therapeutic tool towards mental health?

How can we prevent suicide in dancers?

Why have I chosen this theme?

I have chosen this topic to research and learn more about dancers' mental health and if dance is a good way to help or destroy your mental wellbeing. This is something that I am ambitious of finding out and researching about to learn and understand on a deeper level of mental health challenges in dancers. This piece might help anyone in this position to get advice to help a friend or themselves. I want to find out how has the interplay between dance and mental health has shaped the people they are today.

My first idea of this project.

During the creation of my independent project, I will aim to answer, “why do students commit suicide?” Now, I can see that's a question that gives me a lot of room to investigate. I want to commit this time to research into the performing arts industry and see why dancers have mental health issues and if it is the sector that causes them? Along with this I will investigate prevention of suicide and show dancers where they can seek help. Does dance improve mental health or ruin it? I will incorporate real life experiences from myself, such as my sister who sadly passed due to suicide. Interviewing dancers around my university as I know this will help me gain real life perspectives. My idea is to create an expedition that feels like a safe space for people who I am talking to, who's watching, and I invite collaborators to speak out about how they feel. I will gather research from intellectual books and use reliable articles such as ‘The Impacts of Music, Concerts, and Dance on Mental Health’ which is on oxford academic. I will be using the method of interviewing like-minded people who are within the same field that I am investigating which is the performing arts industry. To

present my practical work, I will introduce what the expedition is about. My idea for this is to have dancers in different parts of the room, improvising or dancing the choreography that I have created during the process. When the audience member is visiting each “station’ there will be either a screen or headphones with audio of real-life events and perspectives of students’ lives and how dance could be a related cause of suicide. I would also like to play with the idea of choreographing a group dance, but I am currently unsure of which style and idea this would consist of.

My sister has been supporting my dancing since I was young, she always told me to never stop. I dance for my sister.

What I want to have in my piece

- ★ 5 main dancers (interviews)
- ★ 8-10 dancers in the final piece
- ★ Improve from my 5 dancers
- ★ Audience members walking round the space freely going to any dancer they want to listen to
- ★ Warm spotlight on my 5 dancers
- ★ Headphone and devices the audience can bring to scan the QR code to listen to the 5 dancer’s interviews while watching them dance.

Dancers in my piece

- ★ Phoebe
- ★ Eva
- ★ Katie
- ★ Elle
- ★ Fin
- ★ Cas

Music for background and the end piece

Me Gusta tu
Free- cat burns
mother I sober
united in grief X count me out

Due to some people dropping out/injury's I had to change my dancers

Coming closer to this project I was faced with a challenge that i had to find different dancers in a short pace of time. I overcame this challenge by politely asking if they were comfortable with joining in and asking permission for them to come out of classes for rehearsal time.

Is music therapy? Does it help mental health? Is it linked?

In my opinion music is therapy and helps me feel emotion that benefits me to connecting to the music. Music helps my mental health personally

When researching if music helps mental health, I found "*Music releases dopamine, the feel-good chemical in your brain. It also found that dopamine was up to 9% higher when people listened to music that they enjoyed. It may be obvious to us, but it is strong evidence for the link between music and mental wellbeing.*" I see this as a great way to help and stay connected to our emotions. It's very interesting to learn and find easy and private ways to help release feelings and emotions.

Questions for my interviews

General background

Can you share a little about your dance journey? When did you start, and what inspired you to do it?

Mental health and dance connection

How has your dancing influenced your mental health over the years?

Mental health challenges in dance

Have you faced mental health challenges such as anxiety, burnout and performance pressure?

Do you think the culture around dance (e.g competitions, expectations, body image) affects mental health? If so, how?

For my interviews I have changed my mind and I'm going to let them speak free minded and see how comfortable they are with sharing their life story involving dance. I want the listeners to realise that the people dancing Infront of them all have different stories, but all have the same love and passion which is quite special. I want to show the audience that these interviews are people speaking out and it's always the best option instead of keeping quiet and suffering. I want to make the dance community/industry a safe and friendly place to stop the rates of suicide and mental health going up.

At the last minute, I ended up changing my mind and using a mood board in the centre of my piece so the dancers could use it while performing but also the audience can go up and read all the research I have collected. This way I had more to show from websites, pictures and even pictures of my pie charts from dancers around the community.

What is mental health?

I learned from World health organisation (WHO) that Mental health is when an individual *"Is in a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It has intrinsic and instrumental value and is integral to our well-being."* Mental health isn't just a negative illness; it has its positive side. In my opinion people who have mental health

issues coping with issues but still manage to get through a day full of stress which shows perseverance and resilience.

Depression meaning

This quote I have found is from an article called 'How depression affects the brain' published by Yale medicine. *"For years and years, doctors and researchers assumed that depression stemmed from an abnormality within these neurotransmitters, particularly serotonin or norepinephrine. But over time, these two neurotransmitters did not seem to account for the symptoms associated with major depression."* This quote is stating how your brain chemicals can affect your mood but on the other hand, not necessary everyone with low serotonin has depression.

Another part of my research is looking at books, websites, social media platforms and word of mouth. I am looking at different question to find new knowledge about this subject.

What causes mental health in dancers?

According to a website called 'behind the curtain' At least 20.8% which is one in five dancers has a few symptoms of depression and anxiety that is caused by dancing. The symptoms of depression were 11.1% in female and 6.4% in male dancers, the anxiety rate is 16.0% in female and 6.4% in male dancers.

Ted Talk - *"By age 15, over 50% of all girls experience multiple health complaints MORE than once a week."*

During my time researching I have found multiple statistics and quotes. Asking these questions, I found that *“Anxiety- which involves feelings of unease and fear- will affect 5% of the population at any one time”*

Looking through websites I found “Human focus” that stated “that four members of the UK population will experience mental health issues. This can range from anxiety and depression to bipolar disorder and OCD.”

More information that I found was *“with the population of the UK at around 67.5 million, that equates to nearly 16.9 million of us living and coping with mental difficulties.”*

What mental health disorder is most prominent in the dance industry?

I found that 20-60% of dancer's have had symptoms of anxiety or depression. Body image is another one that effects dancers which leads to eating disorders. *“The prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms in the current study are higher than previously reported among ballet dancers. In females, 44% of the variability in such mental health symptoms was explained by self-oriented perfectionism and self-esteem.”* This is beneficial towards my project as it shows that perfectionism is a problem that can cause mental health problems. This is just proof that dance nowadays is focused on being perfect and looking a type of way which has come from stereotypes. Being in an open class is all about learning and making yourself a better and versatile dancer but i feel like that has all been forgotten and it's all about being perfect with no mistakes just to post a video on social media and if you come from the class without a perfect video it can make you feel less confident and doubt yourself.

Books

While reading through books I found one called “The oxford handbook of dance and wellbeing”. This book talks about how your brain works and releases emotion during dance. A chunk of the book I liked said *“How can dance have such far-reaching positive effects?”*

Dancing allows us to be creative, to experience our body and its ways of moving in novel ways, and thereby to learn about ourselves. Dancing in sync with others or with a musical beat can elicit a feeling of joy, harmony, and alignment that can easily be shared."

USC speak you mind challenge

The USC speak you mind challenge is a movement that influences, and the general public are participating in. They are nominating their friends and family to pour a bucket of cold ice water over your head to spread awareness and show support for mental health. It shows people that you can speak your mind and express how you are feeling. I found this challenge on platforms like TikTok and Instagram and found a women explaining what this movement is all about she said "A lot of people are affected by mental health struggles every single day and every single year, and this trend is really to let you know that no matter what your going through to always speak your mind, let your story be heard".

Social media is a big part of finding great information, I have been scrolling through and searching for videos linked to mental health and came across a lot of videos explaining about this but also many people taking part of this challenge. Finding this information helped me find different ways to spread awareness. I never knew that the ice bucket had a meaning behind it but after searching it up i was greatly to find that doing a silly little challenge has proved and shown a lot of support and did its job by making me and other general members of the public aware of supporting mental health.

Accordingly, to 'University of South Carolina' they said "Just over 10 years ago, millions of people started posting videos of the icy challenge to raise awareness of ALS, a degenerative illness with no known cure. The viral movement proved so successful that The ALS Association has raised millions for research."

I also found a quote from the head football coach at this university stating "That's something everyone in this world struggles with: mental challenges. And we certainly want to bring awareness to it and let everyone know you are not alone. With that, we know how important that is to not only our football program but to our entire athletic department."



Google Docs form

I made a google docs form and shared it to my platforms and asked everyone to answer if they felt comfortable with it. I found that this was a broad way to expand research through people I have close connections with or just know through social media. I have had a lot of responses which have helped me massively by expanded my knowledge and finding new things to research.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdlrItlsfhCxtkhHV1VFTyqk7jtH3aa1IaeVrcYaes4-8Ht1w/viewform?usp=dialog>

When I started collecting feedback from this form, I received a lot of honest and emotional responses that really caught me off guard. I didn't expect people to open up the way they did, and it made me realize that many dancers—some of whom I know personally—have strong and mixed feelings about how dance affects their mental

health. This was eye-opening for me and made me want to explore the topic more deeply.

To better understand these experiences, I asked the question: *“How has dance influenced your mental health?”* The answers I got were quite varied, with both positive and negative experiences shared. On the positive side, many dancers said that dance helped boost their confidence, made them feel good by releasing endorphins, and gave them a way to escape from the stress of everyday life. For these people, dance was more than just a hobby or job—it was something that helped them feel stronger and more in control of their emotions.

However, the negative side of the feedback told a different story. Some dancers said they often compared themselves to others, which made them feel like they weren’t good enough. Others talked about dealing with anxiety, and how spending hours in front of mirrors made them overly critical of their bodies and movements. For them, dance could feel more draining than uplifting.

Hearing both sides of these experiences really showed me how complex the relationship between dance and mental health can be. It made me think more about how dance environments could be more supportive and about the importance of talking openly about mental health in the dance world.

The most important question I asked on my form was *“How can we prevent suicide in dancers?”*

“Being more open to talking about it, and being allowed to feel a certain way and not expected to leave worries outside of the studio environment”

“More support, wellbeing class on a dance course or studio”

“Change some tutors attitudes towards dance by speaking more positively, don’t put students down each time they are wrong. Body shaming is also an issue during dance, so we need to stop this and let any dance style include any body type as constantly comparing your body to others is unhealthy and a problem in the dance industry.”

"Make speaking about mental health normal in dance. Show dancers that you are allowed to be vulnerable and that it doesn't make you any less strong or any less of a dancer"

These answers are a few ways that people think that will prevent suicide. If we start with things like this, we could end up solving a massive problem today and for the foreseeable. I want to take control of this situation and sort the dance industry out for the better. My project will help people and myself have a better understanding of this problem and take some action to help a friend, family member or themselves.

Mind.org.uk

Mind is a leading mental health charity in England and Wales, offering support, information, and campaigns to improve mental health and well-being. This campaign provides various number of resources that includes, helplines, online information, and guides to help people in need understand what is going on with their mental health and where to find support. This website is a safe space online that you can contact by sending an email or even calling their Infoline or support line if you or anyone you know needs help mentally. "Every year, 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem. But too many of us aren't getting the help we need." This website is a great place for people in need to speak out and seek help from. As to why I have put posters in my practical piece is to show and inform my audience that this is a brilliant way to be informed on this subject. Mind.org.uk is also a way that others can help mothers by donating money to help people in need get a call. This organisation was founded in 1946.

(A quote from someone who has used this charity.)

"I think I would have given up quite easily if it hadn't been for a charity like Mind... If you don't have tools or the right resources. Or charities to help you, then you're kind of left on an island unto yourself, really." - Sunny

Stephen Fry is the president for the Mind charity,

Mind has been working across the UK for over 70 years to support and improve individuals in need of help. Mind helps raise awareness and promotes mental health to others that want to learn for themselves or for others.

Mind is charity based and by donating you could help someone struggling get a phone call for advice and support.

Positive and negative sides towards mental health awareness

Positive

- ★ It reduces the stereotype that is around mental health and makes people less embarrassed to seek help.
- ★ Helps break the silence.
- ★ More knowledge to see help like hotlines or therapy.
- ★ Being aware of your illness it could help with better understanding from family, friend's or partners.

- ★ you will be aware of how you are feeling and feel the need to get support to help yourself before it gets worse.

Negatives

- ★ The stereotyping still exists, and people may still be embarrassed to admit and seek help.
- ★ When struggling with cost it might be hard to seek help that may be payment only.
- ★ Pressure to always seem happy and feel okay to people around you and not speaking out can cause harm.
- ★ Waiting lists in the NHS or normal counselling and therapy can delay help and make it longer for you to have medication or to even feel okay which can be detrimental to you mind and mental health.
- ★ Not being able to have a supporting friend group or family due to not having enough information put around and not knowing what's really going on and how you feel.

What dance genre has the highest statistic for negative mental health?

I have realised that when researching mental health in dancers it will always come up with ballet dancers that suffer a lot with injury's that can lead to not moving as much as they would of when they weren't injured and not releasing serotonin. A big one in the ballet industry is body image due to teachers telling them they are too big to be a ballerina or putting them on weighing scales every month with a diet plan.

According to 'Mental health missions' "16.4% of ballet dancers have experienced bad eating behaviours and are significantly higher than that the general public".

Ballet dancers don't just suffer from eating disorder, but depression and anxiety is another big one. Another website called 'Behind the curtain' it states that "35.4% of dancers, including those specializing in ballet, report symptoms of depression and anxiety." This shows that ballet on its own as a style is the most problematic.

Ballet has always been toxic in my eyes from an outsider's point of view from hearing stories about ballet teachers using their 'old school' teaching methods and telling their students to lose weight or saying you will never be in the industries if you are that big.

In my opinion, I feel that other styles especially contemporary and hip hop are the most inclusive and supportive when it comes to weight and health.

Mood board

Everyone has some sort of disorder if that's anxiety, depressing, OCD, eating disorders and so forth

Mental health awareness month

Mon, 12 May 2025 – Sun, 18 May 2025

Mental health awareness week is to celebrate and spread awareness to those in the situations. This week is to educate and inform people about mental health conditions. Breaking the silence around the mental health struggles. Encouraging people to be open and speak out not only to help and educate others but also to help themselves.

May is the month that represents mental health awareness which made me more in touch that I am also spreading awareness with my piece I have created.

History

“May was decided Mental Health Awareness Month in 1949. This month was first recognized by ‘Mental Health America’ and was founded in 1908. (MHA) was founded by Clifford W. Beers who wrote about his experiences.

Every year it has a specific theme that focuses on the different mental health aspects. This year's theme in the UK is ‘community’ and in America it is “Turn awareness into action”. These themes are as important as each other. Community is to get everyone together and be communally aware of the different aspects of mental health and create a world full of support and care for one another.



Dr Alex George

Alex lost his brother to suicide but not realising how his brother felt when he was alive that led to him campaigning the way people feel but mainly how men feel. There was a whole movement on men's mental health for the reasoning of men don't speak out as much as women might as women are more in touch and vulnerable with emotions than men. It's stereotyped that men don't cry and if they do, they aren't real men which leads to them keeping quiet and ends in suicide.

Alex has mad books, podcast's and TikTok videos on mental health awareness and spreading his stories to others. In his TikTok's he stated "Have meaningful conversations, genuinely as people how they are and really care about the answer"
<https://www.tiktok.com/@dralexgeorge/video/7503846591321656598? r=1& t=ZN-8wKapjysufO>

Asking how someone is feeling could make their day better and feel less lonely. A simple small question can go a long way.

Alex's brother was just 19 when he committed suicide during COVID that changed his family's lives. Alex wrote two books on mental health called "Mind manual" and "A better day: Your positive mental health handbook".

A better day: your positive mental health handbook

This book was written for younger readers and gives advice, tools and guidance with your mental health. This book is a positive way to help the younger generation with navigating their mental health and making them be seen instead of being ignored or lonely. In this book he written out affirmations to start your day off right such as: "You are worthy, you are good enough." this is there for a reminder that you are good the way you are! Another quote is "Don't be afraid to start over again." If you fail that's a normal part of life, just pick yourself up and start again. These are quotes that will help the younger generation feel better about themselves and have a good mindset. Its beneficial for not just young people but also full grown adults to have these words in your life.

<https://amzn.eu/d/22KSpyg>

Logbook

22nd January - I started to choreograph and listen to the music which helped me envision what I would want my practical piece to look like. It gave motivation to carry on and dive deeper into my research to find new ideas. I looked at adding people in to look like audience members to join in at some point in the piece as a symbol of "everyone around is always there or might feel the same way" I wanted it to be a Surprise for the audience and to be impactful a bit like a flashmob. I was getting very overwhelmed and started second guessing my project but after this session I felt more secured in myself and why I started this theme and project in the first place.

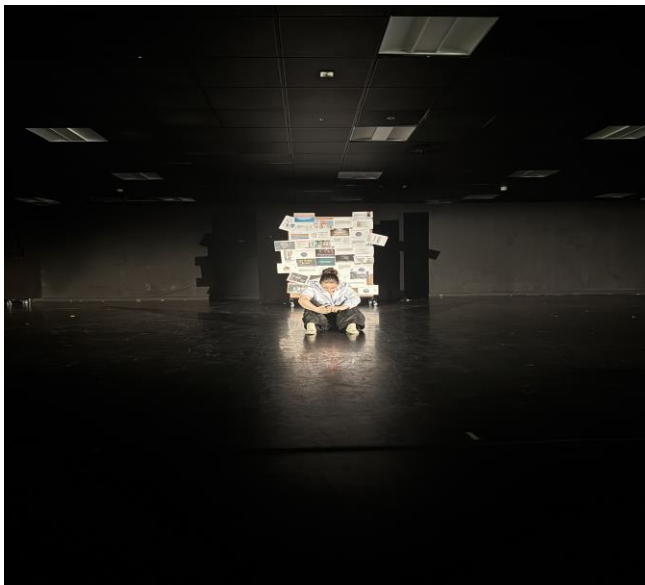
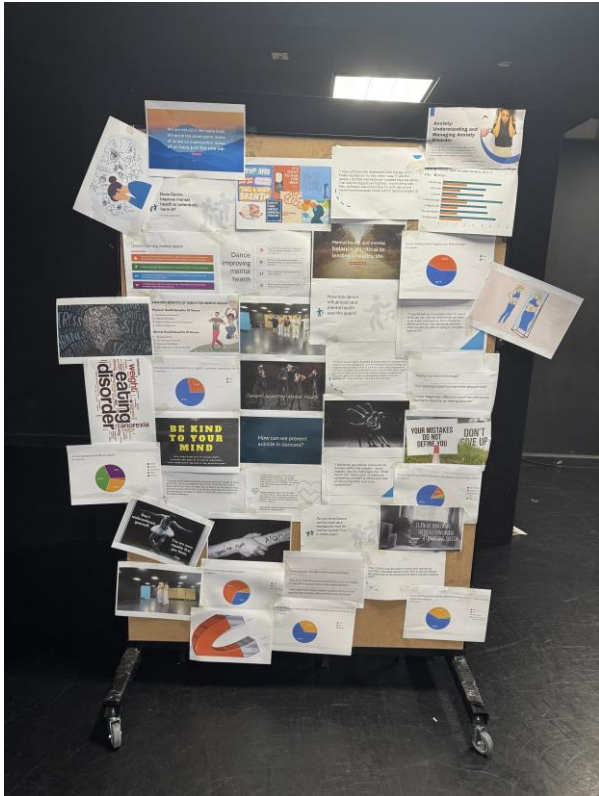
30th April - I utilized my six dancers in the space and choreographed my dance on them to sit in their body comfortably. Unfortunately, not all seven of my dancers could attend this lesson that made me feel stressed but on the positive side of the lesson was that each dancer contributed their unique energy in the rehearsal space and complimented each other well with movements. We made several adjustments throughout the process and by the end of the rehearsal I felt accomplishment and relief with how it turned out and I am eager to see how it comes together for the live performance.

5th May - This rehearsal was very beneficial and gave me a sense of relief, especially because I reached the nine-minute mark in my choreography. It felt good to see things finally coming together, and watching it back made me feel more relaxed and confident about how the piece is developing. I spent time working on Armelle and Phoebe's solo and duet sections, which went well. They understood the movement and the meaning behind it, and it was great to see how their performances added more emotion to the piece.

The group section still needs quite a bit of work, especially since it's the final part that will bring my piece to the full 10-minute length. I know it must end in a way that feels strong and meaningful, so I used this rehearsal to try out some new ideas and see what worked. Even though there's still more to do, this session helped me feel like I'm on the right track and gave me a better idea of how to move forward.

6th May- The tech run was the moment when I truly saw my work come to life in its full depth, and it gave me a strong sense of relief and accomplishment. Seeing all the elements such as, movement, music, and lighting all come together made me realise how far the piece had developed from the initial idea. Working with the lighting team was quite smooth because I came into the session with a clear vision of what I wanted and exactly when I needed each cue. This preparation not only made the technical process more efficient but also allowed me to spend more time focusing on the dancers' performance.

The performance was great there were a few mistakes, but I am happy with how it turned out. After the whole show I felt a wave of relief and a lot of emotion and showed me that this project meant a lot to me for any reasons and my dancers portrayed the emotion and danced beautifully. At the end of the piece I thanked everyone for coming and allowed them to feel free and look at my research board at the back. I had positive feedback from friends and family that made me very happy. Overall, I am proud of what I created and glad I came up with this concept and how it turned out.



Inspiration

I have been looking at a piece devised by Paris Cav who has captured my interest and given me ideas and different concepts I wanted to try out. She created a piece called united in grief which I also have used the same song. I found her by looking up the song titles I chosen and searching them to find different ways I could use the music for different dynamics and simple but effective choreography.

My source for inspiration has been TikTok, I have found a lot of different contemporary videos, partner work and tricks I would love to put in my piece.

Another inspiration I have taken is improvisation contact partner work that I loved working, and experiment knew and different ways to move around the space but still portraying the theme.

I took inspiration from my own experiences in mental health and suicide and how i felt during that time period and put movements that reflected my feelings into the piece.

Clips below of my practical piece

<https://youtube.com/shorts/UzzeNEKJiak>

<https://youtu.be/DiTL8gKH0RY?si=zTbsHejLdDOvSIXq>

https://youtu.be/FJxIuLJY_gY

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