

Exploring the Psychological Well-Being Perceptions of Dancers Through a Qualitative Approach

Dans Eden Bireylerin Psikolojik İyi Oluş Algılarının Nitel Bir Yaklaşımla İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine, through a qualitative lens, how regular engagement in dance activities influences individuals' stress levels and emotional states. Beyond describing participants' experiences, the study aims to shed light on the role of dance in fostering mental well-being. Moreover it highlights the potential of dance-based practices as complementary approaches within the field of mental health.

Method: Employing a phenomenological research design, the study involved with 17 young adult participants who consistently attended dance activities. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and subjected to content analysis. Through this analytic process, themes, categories, and codes were systematically identified to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences.

Results: The analysis revealed that most participants experienced a marked reduction in stress, improvements in mood, and a sense of emotional release through dance. The stress-reducing and mood-enhancing effects of dance were particularly pronounced among individuals reporting higher initial levels of stress. These findings underscore the capacity of dance to function not only as a physical practice but also as a meaningful psychosocial resource that contributes to emotional regulation and psychological balance.

Conclusion: Dance was found to facilitate stress management, cultivate positive affective states, and enhance overall psychological well-being. In light of these findings, it is recommended that dance be recognized as a valuable complementary method in both individual- and group-based mental health interventions, with implications for preventive, therapeutic, and community-oriented practices.

Keywords: Dance, qualitative research, psychological well-being, stress, happiness

ÖZ

Amaç: Düzenli olarak dans aktivitelerine katılan bireylerin stres düzeyleri ve duygusal durumlarını nitel bir yaklaşımla incelemektir. Çalışma, dansın bireylerin psikolojik iyi oluşuna nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu anlamayı ve dans temelli müdahalelerin ruh sağlığı alanındaki potansiyelini ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

Yöntem: Araştırma, nitel araştırma desenlerinden fenomenoloji yaklaşımı kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma grubu, dans aktivitelerine düzenli olarak katılan 17 genç yetişkin bireyden oluşmaktadır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmış ve içerik analizi yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. İçerik analizi doğrultusunda temalar, kategoriler ve kodlar oluşturulmuştur.

Bulgular: Elde edilen bulgulara göre katılımcıların büyük bir bölümü, dansın stres düzeylerinde belirgin azalma sağladığını, ruh hallerinde iyileşme ve duygusal boşalım yaşadığını belirtmiştir. Özellikle yüksek stres düzeyine sahip bireylerde dansın daha güçlü rahatlatıcı etkiler yarattığı görülmüştür. Araştırma sonuçları, dansın sadece fiziksel bir etkinlik olmanın ötesinde, bireyin psikolojik dengesini destekleyen etkili bir araç olduğunu göstermektedir.

Sonuç: Dansın stresle başa çıkmayı kolaylaştırdığı, pozitif ruh hali kazandırdığı ve genel psikolojik iyi oluşu artırdığı belirlenmiştir. Bu bulgular doğrultusunda dansın, bireysel veya grup temelli ruh sağlığı müdahalelerinde tamamlayıcı bir yöntem olarak değerlendirilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Dans, nitel araştırma, psikolojik iyi oluş, stres, mutluluk

Introduction

Psychological well-being is defined as an individual's capacity to find life meaningful, achieve self-actualization, establish and manage healthy relationships with others, and cope with the challenges of life (Keyes et al. 2002). The increasing demands of modern life expose individuals more frequently to stressors that threaten this state of well-being, and it is expected that individuals maintain relatively low levels of general stress in order to successfully manage their psychological well-being processes. Stress, by disrupting physical, emotional, and cognitive balance, can lower the overall quality of life (Schneiderman et al. 2005) and is often confused with anxiety, depression, or frustration, although it represents a distinct physiological condition (Lyon 2012).

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Elevated stress levels are associated with numerous adverse outcomes, including anxiety, depression, difficulties in anger management, and interpersonal conflicts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Today, a considerable proportion of individuals live under constant stress, often without being fully aware of it (Akman 2004), which is a condition that not only diminishes the quality of life but also leads to a variety of negative consequences such as sleep disorders, weakened immune functioning, and emotional exhaustion (Caz and Yazıcı 2024). Therefore, interventions that are effective in coping with stress and supporting psychological balance hold utmost importance in contemporary mental health literature.

On the other hand, regular physical activity has been scientifically demonstrated to be an effective means of reducing stress, facilitating emotion regulation, and promoting psychological well-being (Stathopoulou et al. 2006, Biddle and Asare 2011). Within this framework, dance -one particular form of physical activity- stands out from traditional types of exercise by virtue of its artistic and emotional dimensions, beyond being merely a physical activity. Offering participants both an enjoyable and meaningful experience, dance contributes to emotional release, enhances self-awareness, and strengthens interpersonal bonds within group settings (Quiroga Murcia et al. 2010, Koch et al. 2019). Singh et al. (2023) further emphasize that dance fosters self-efficacy and self-confidence, thereby activating social support mechanisms and improving stress-coping abilities. Particularly for adults, dance serves a multifaceted function as a mode of emotional expression, a tool for psychological relaxation, and a platform for social interaction. Consequently, engaging in various forms of exercise or activity, including dance, is considered essential for individuals to distance themselves from stress and achieve enhanced emotional and psychological well-being.

In the present study, it is hypothesized that individuals' demographic characteristics -such as age, gender, marital status, music preference, and smoking or alcohol consumption- may play a determining role in their stress levels and emotional states. In this context, taking demographic variables into account is of great importance for a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional aspects of individuals' dance experiences. Age, for instance, can influence both the perception of stress and the strategies employed to cope with it. Findings by Ateşoğlu and Erkal (2024) also indicate that perceived stress levels tend to decrease with advancing age. Gender constitutes another key factor in emotional expression and coping with stress; Matud (2004) has suggested that women exhibit more intense emotional responses and may derive greater benefits from creative forms of expression such as dance. Music preferences are directly associated with mood and emotion regulation, and the type of music listened to during dance can significantly shape an individual's experience and stress responses (Labbe et al. 2007, Vella et al. 2024). Habits such as smoking and alcohol consumption often emerge as consequences of stress or as attempts to cope with it; however, such behaviors tend to heighten stress perception and negatively affect psychological well-being (Koob and Le Moal 2005, Pinar et al. 2014). Therefore, incorporating demographic characteristics into studies addressing individuals' cognitive and emotional dimensions is regarded as crucial for deriving meaningful research outcomes.

Thus participation in dance activities reduces individuals' stress levels, fosters a sense of tranquility, and allows participants to enjoy themselves to the extent that they may not even perceive it as exercise (Anderson et al. 2014, Ben Waer et al. 2024). A review of the existing literature on dance reveals that most studies have predominantly focused on its physical effects, while psychological processes have either been overlooked or examined in conjunction with other forms of activity such as zumba or yoga, with limited attention given to unique choreographic dance practices (Alkan and Onur 2024, Choudhary and Dubey 2024, Verma et al. 2024). Moreover, these studies, conducted largely through quantitative methods, have been insufficient in capturing the depth of individuals' subjective experiences, emotional responses, and stress-coping processes. Building upon these gaps, the present study aims to qualitatively examine the stress levels and emotional states of adult individuals who have been regularly participating in dance activities for at least six weeks. Understanding how demographic characteristics intersect with personal experiences not only contributes theoretically to the literature but also provides practical guidance for practitioners seeking to consider dance as a tool for mental health. This study seeks to elucidate the psychological functions of dance within the context of individual differences and to lay the groundwork for implementing dance-based interventions in addressing psychological challenges.

Method

This study, which aims to explore in depth the stress and emotional states of individuals who regularly participate in dance activities, was conducted using a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods emphasize participants' perspectives, include researchers' processes of exploration and interpretation, and aim to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The purpose of this approach is to uncover underlying meanings through a comprehensive investigation (Creswell and Poth 2016).

Sample

In 2025, a total of 17 young adults, including 3 men and 14 women, participated in the study. In qualitative research, sample size varies depending on the data collection method; however, achieving data saturation is considered essential across all techniques. In this regard, qualitative studies conducted with 10 participants by Jones et al. (2002) and with 12 participants by Bull et al. (2005) may serve as references, supporting the adequacy of the current sample size.

The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: individuals had to have been regularly engaged in dance activities for at least six weeks, be willing to participate voluntarily, and possess sufficient expressive ability to provide meaningful and adequate responses during interviews. No interventions were applied to participants throughout the research process, and the study was carried out with individuals who regarded dance as a part of their lives regardless of their personal circumstances. These criteria were established to align with the study's aim of evaluating the effects of dance on individuals' stress and emotional states and to enable an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences. The minimum requirement of six weeks was based on behavioral change thresholds suggested in the literature for the observation of the psychological effects of dance (Pektaş and Pirim 2023). Exclusion criteria included participation in dance activities for less than six weeks, unwillingness to take part in the study, inability to express oneself due to cognitive or emotional reasons, and being a professional dancer. Professional dancers were excluded from the scope of this study, as their motivation, attitudes, and level of experience toward dance may significantly differ from those of amateur participants, potentially compromising the homogeneity of the data.

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 26 years, and all reported being single. Based on self-reports, participants indicated their perceived stress levels as high (7 participants), moderate (8 participants), and low (2 participants). In addition, it was found that smoking and alcohol consumption habits varied equally within the participant group. The duration of participation in dance activities among the group ranged from 5 months to 5 years. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented with frequencies and percentages in Table 2.

Procedure

This study was ethically approved by the Non-Interventional Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine at Aydın Adnan Menderes University (Decision No. 03, Reference No. E-53043469-050.04-731320, dated 08.05.2025). Prior to data collection, all participants provided written informed consent.

As data collection tools, a demographic information form prepared by the researchers and a semi-structured interview form were employed, with interviews transcribed using Google Dictation. This method was chosen because it allows the researchers to ask the same predetermined questions to different individuals and, when sufficient responses are not obtained, enables the addition of follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the situation (Patton 1987). The questions in the semi-structured interview form were developed based on a review of the relevant literature and observations of individuals participating in dance activities. A pool of questions was created regarding the key topics, and the form was refined through expert consultation. The linguistic validity of the questions was ensured by testing them on individuals outside the study sample. Subsequently, the finalized questions deemed suitable for the research were posed to volunteer participants selected through purposive sampling, via face-to-face interviews, in order to collect the research data. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and were conducted over four consecutive days. To minimize the potential influence of human and environmental factors, all interviews were carried out in the same setting with all participants.

Demographic Information Form

This section includes information on age, gender, marital status, usual music preferences or genres, and the status and frequency of smoking and alcohol consumption. The semi-structured interview questions developed for data collection in this study are presented in Table 1.

Statistical Analysis

In this study, the analysis of the collected data employed descriptive and content analysis methods, which are

commonly used in qualitative research. Each participant was assigned an anonymous code in the format P(n), and responses obtained from the interviews were continuously compared for similarities and differences. During this process, themes were generated regarding participants' reasons for engaging in dance, the meanings they attributed to it, stress management and psychological support, mood, and happiness. Subsequently, the direct effects of dance on stress and emotions were examined within the context of individual differences. Recurrent expressions, patterns, and meaningful structures in participants' narratives were identified, coded, categorized, and organized into themes. The constant comparative method (Maykut and Morehouse 2002) was applied, enabling both within-text and between-participant comparisons.

Additionally, content analysis, a systematic and objective approach that groups similar data meaningfully under specific concepts and themes (Krippendorff 2018), was used to provide a comprehensive evaluation of how participants' dance experiences affected stress coping and emotional balance. To enhance the reliability and validity of the study, several measures were taken.

The interview form was developed based on a literature review and refined through feedback from three experts to ensure internal validity. External validity was addressed by providing a detailed description of the study population, participant profile, data collection procedures, and analysis process. Internal reliability was ensured by supporting findings with numerical tables and direct quotations from participants, while external reliability was maintained by transparently reporting the research process and having two expert researchers conduct the analyses. Throughout the analysis, researchers remained objective, and inter-coder agreement was assessed using the Kappa coefficient ($\kappa = 0.76$, indicating good agreement). The consistency of coding was further verified through independent analyses conducted by multiple experts on the same dataset.

Table 1. Semi-structured interview form questions

Themes	No	Research Questions
Meaning Attributed to Dance and Reasons for Participation	1	What does dancing mean to you, or why do you participate in dance activities?
	9	What can you say about the importance of participating in dance for adults in particular?
Stress Management and Psychological Support	2	How did you manage stressful situations before engaging in dance?
	3	Is there a difference between the stress you experienced before participating in dance and the stress you felt afterward? If so, what is it?
	4	What is the greatest psychological support that dance provides you when faced with stressful events in daily life?
Mood, Happiness, and Mental Impact	5	What meaning does dance hold for you in terms of physical and mental relaxation?
	6	Does dancing make you happy? If so, how does it affect your level of happiness in the short and long term? You may explain with examples.
	7	What are your thoughts on the power of dance to change your mood when you feel bad?
	8	How do you evaluate the effect of dance on managing your emotions and gaining a positive mood?

Results

Table 2 presents demographic information about the participants, including their age, gender, marital status, harmful habits, perceived stress levels, duration of dance experience, and most frequently listened-to music genres. For all demographic information, frequency (f) and percentage (%) values are given based on the total number of participants (n=17). Only for frequently listened-to music genres, the code (genre) frequency and percentage were used as a basis due to participants indicating several at once. Upon examining the table, it is observed that the participant group consists of young adults aged between 18 and 26, with 3 male and 14 female participants, all of whom are single. Furthermore, it was determined that nearly half of the group engages in harmful habits (alcohol and smoking), while the other half does not. When asked to define their perceived stress levels based on self-report, 8 participants (47.05%) described themselves as having an average stress level, and 7 participants (41.18%) as having a high stress level, while excluding 2 participants. Regarding their dance practice, it was found that the lowest duration ranged between 5 months and 1 year (n=7), 3 individuals danced for 2-3 years, and 7 individuals danced for 4 years or more. Therefore, the research group can be considered sufficient for evaluating the mood and stress perception of regularly dancing individuals based on their experiences. Finally, among the participants, who are closely involved with music, the most frequently listened-to music genres were identified as Pop (76.47%), Rock (47.35%), Rap (35.29%), and Hip-hop, Techno, Jazz-Classical (17.64%). Additionally, only 1 participant stated listening to Arabesque music. It was also determined through content analysis that this participant perceived an average level of stress (P7).

Table 2. Demographic information of participants

Variables	f	%
Age		
18-20	6	35.29
21-23	9	52.94
24-26	2	11.76
Gender		
Male	3	17.64
Female	14	82.35
Marital Status		
Single	17	100
Preferred Music Genre		
Pop	13	76.47
Rap	6	35.29
Rock	8	47.05
Hip-hop	3	17.64
Harmful Habits (Smoking-Alcohol)		
Uses	8	47.05
N/A	9	52.94
Perceived Stress Level		
Low	2	11.76
Average	8	47.05
High	7	41.18
Dance Experience		
5 months- 1 year	7	41.50
2-3 years	3	17.64
4 years and over	7	41.50
Preferred Music Genre		
Techno	3	17.64
Arabesque	1	5.88
Jazz-Classical	3	17.64

*Percentages may exceed 100% due to multiple responses from participants.

Table 3. Participants' views on the themes

Theme	Category	Code	f	%
Meaning Attributed to Dance and Reasons for Participation	Freedom and self-expression	Individuality, identity formation, self-expression	6	35.29
	Physical/mental balance	Relaxation, unwinding, body-mind harmony, relief from work stress, mental break	6	35.29
	Happiness and enjoyment	Fun, pleasure, emotional uplift	3	17.65
	Socialization	Meeting new people, group environment	2	11.76
Stress Management and Psychological Support	Alternative coping strategies	Listening to music, walking, praying, talking with friends	7	41.18
	Decrease in stress level	Noticeable reduction in stress after dance	6	35.29
	Mental and emotional support	Inner relaxation, discharge	4	23.53
Mood, Happiness, and Mental Impact	Mood transformation	Transition from negative to positive mood	7	41.18
	Source of happiness	Short-term and long-term happiness effect of dance	6	35.29
	Body and mind harmony	Mental discharge, physical relaxation	4	23.53

Within the theme of Meaning Attributed to Dance and Reasons for Participation, 17 valid expressions obtained from a total of 17 participants were analyzed (Table 3). The most emphasized aspect by participants (35.29%, f=6) was that dance is a means of individual freedom and self-expression, and that it provides physical and mental balance. 17.65% (f=3) stated that it brings happiness and pleasure. Additionally, 11.76% (f=2) indicated that dance contributes to socialization. These findings suggest that dance is not merely an activity for individuals; it also functions as an "identity space," a "ground for relaxation," and a "social connector."

P9: "For me, dance is something where I can clear my head, free myself from all the stress and troubles of life. I love expressing myself through dance. Going to dance after work feels like medicine to me. It's as if I leave the day's burden outside the door. My daily life is very busy, but dedicating my free time to dance makes me feel very good; I get relieved. I think everyone who loves to dance should use their free time (even if it is little) for dancing."

P10: "It allows me to socialize and reduces my stress in life. Meeting new people, moving together, and sharing within a group feels good for my soul. It should definitely be done to escape work stress; it's not a feeling to be ashamed of. Get carried away by the rhythm of the music and enjoy life, because we don't know what will happen next."

P16: "I think dancing means moving with music, flowing with the music, responding to the rhythm. I participate because it makes me feel happy. It's a great hobby for those who love and are interested in dancing to spend their time."

Within the theme of Stress Management and Psychological Support, 17 valid expressions from a total of 17 participants were analyzed (Table 3). 41.18% (f=7) of the participants stated that before adopting dance, they used alternative methods such as listening to music, praying, talking with friends, or walking to cope with stress. On the other hand, 35.29% (f=6) stated that dance directly led to a decrease in their stress levels; and 23.53% (f=4) emphasized that dance provided inner relaxation and psychological release. These findings indicate that dance is used as both a preventive and therapeutic tool in the process of coping with stress. Participant responses are provided below as evidence of the obtained results.

P3: "Dance offers me not only a physical but also an emotional release. Before I started dancing, I couldn't manage my stress. It can be said that I started dancing to get away from daily life stress and to isolate myself. Does dancing have an effect on managing my stress? Yes, it does. It allows me to think more clearly and find solutions more easily. It helps me think healthily and gain a new perspective by moving away from problems."

P5: "Before I started dancing, I used to try to cope with stressful situations by crying. I started dancing, and afterward, my self-confidence increased, so I started controlling my stress better. I don't know if I'm attributing too much meaning, but I think that no situation I experience while dancing can break me."

P7: "I can't remember my stressful situation before I started dancing, so I guess you can understand its effect from that. As I danced, my stress decreased, and it felt good for my soul. It helps me get out of difficult moments and return to my true self."

Within the theme of Mood, Happiness, and Mental Impact, 17 valid expressions obtained from a total of 17 participants were analyzed (Table 3). 41.18% (f=7) of the participants stated that dance transformed their mood, providing a transition from negative to positive emotions. 35.29% (f=6) indicated that dance provided both immediate and long-term happiness. 23.53% (f=4) emphasized that dance was effective in achieving body and mind harmony. These findings reveal that dance is an important tool in individuals' processes of establishing mental balance. The results obtained support the findings of the psychological support and stress management theme of dance. Participant responses are provided below as evidence of the obtained results.

P3: "It is obvious that it has a great physical contribution, and on the days I dance, I sleep more comfortably and uninterrupted. Besides, I feel that I can exist in my most natural state while dancing. Nobody judges me. The energy I get every time I make progress while dancing also makes me more motivated for my other tasks and responsibilities. Participating in dance helps me get away from daily life stress, so it helps me get rid of all the stress in my life, and I am in a more energetic mood."

P11: "It prevents me from thinking about other things; at that moment, I just focus on dancing, and because my body is working, I feel good physically. I notice that my happiness increases during and after dancing. Even if I am tired and stressed before dancing, when I dance, even though it is a physical activity, it relieves my tiredness and stress."

P15: "When I start dancing, I usually continue for a long time. Mentally, it removes me from negative and stressful emotions to some extent and makes me happy. Physically, surrendering the flexibility of my body to the rhythm of the music and using my body is very special for me. Of course, dancing makes me happy. Dancing at the end of a school day, for example, helps me get away from what I experienced at school. In the long run, if I am going to the dance studio to dance that week, I long for that day to come. Dancers often don't dance because they can dance wonderfully. Of course, they want to dance well, but they dance because the dance they perform makes them happy and helps them manage their emotional states in a positive way. It's the same for me."

Discussion

This study aims to qualitatively examine the stress levels and emotional states of young adults who regularly participate in dance activities for at least 6 weeks. The research sought to understand the meanings participants ascribe to dance, their stress coping mechanisms, and the impact of dance on their mood. The study also evaluated how demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, preferred music genre, duration of dance participation, and habits (smoking and alcohol use) intersect with these processes.

The research group comprised 17 volunteer participants, 14 women and 3 men, aged between 18 and 26. All participants were single. Their duration of dance participation ranged from 5 months to 5 years. Regarding perceived stress levels, 7 individuals reported high stress, 8 reported moderate stress, and 2 reported low stress. In terms of smoking/alcohol use, half of the participants reported having these habits, while the other half did not. These characteristics indicate that the group generally consists of individuals who feel a need to cope with stress and have adopted dance for this purpose. In accordance with the nature of qualitative research, continuous comparative analyses in this section of the study will re-evaluate each finding in relation to demographic characteristics, thereby striving to ensure the generalizability of the results.

35.29% of participants defined dance as a means of individual freedom and self-expression. The majority of this group consisted of female participants aged 18-23, a period notably characterized by intense identity development and the search for individual expression. Similarly, the fact that female participants constituted 82.35% of the study group explains the more intense need to express emotions. Those who viewed dance as a tool for physical/mental balance (35.29%) were predominantly participants with 4 or more years of dance experience. This suggests that as dance practice increases, it provides not only enjoyment but also mental balance and deepened awareness. The function of dance as a "mental break" was particularly emphasized for young adults (11.76%), with these comments typically coming from participants who danced after work hours (e.g., P9). Furthermore, the fact that all participants were single aligns with their perception of dance as both a means of self-expression and a context for social bonding.

The literature contains both consistent and conflicting results with the current research findings. Quiroga Murcia et al. (2010), in their study evaluating the effects of dance on health with 475 amateur dancers, stated that dance is an art form that allows people to express their inner worlds. Similarly, Koch et al. (2014), in their study with depressed patients, observed that dancers felt more free and creative, supporting the current research findings. However, Tarr et al. (2016), who examined the effects of dance on endorphin release and social relationships, commented that while dance strengthens social bonds within a group, the aspect of individual expression should not be overlooked, partially supporting the current findings. This research is consistent with the findings of Kassing and Jay (2003), who argue that dance is more individually focused than socially interactive. This may be more applicable to dance professionals rather than individuals participating in dance for activity purposes. The study by Heras-Fernandez et al. (2023) can be cited as an example of this. Their research, conducted solely with professional dancers, concluded that dance directly triggers stress during the performance process. Although these results appear to contradict the current research, the difference can be explained by the change in the sample. Therefore, this study is valuable in demonstrating that stress is influenced by context.

41.18% of participants stated that they coped with stress using passive or individual methods such as listening to music, walking, and praying before adopting dance. This indicates that individuals without harmful habits tend to seek relief through natural means. 35.29% reported a significant decrease in stress levels after dancing, with these comments primarily coming from individuals who described their stress levels as high. This suggests that the stress-reducing effect of dance was most pronounced in the group that needed it most. With a rate of 23.53%, participants described dance as a means of "emotional release" and "de-stressing." Most of these experiences were reported by individuals who had been dancing for a longer period, indicating that the psychological effects become more intense with continuous dance practice.

The literature contains studies examining the effects of dance on stress in various groups. A study on adolescents stated that dance reduces stress and anxiety, particularly in coping with daily life factors (Duberg et al. 2020), while a study on adults reported a significant decrease in stress levels among dancing adults (Jeong et al. 2005). Furthermore, Brauningner (2012) reported that dance reduces stress and anxiety levels, Ho et al. (2016) found that dance therapy reduces symptoms of trauma-related stress disorder, and Pinniger et al. (2012) indicated that tango, a partner dance, is effective in reducing depression and stress. The findings of the current study are consistent with other research reporting a decrease in stress levels with regular dance participation. Finally, Singh et al. (2023), in their dance-based meta-analysis with adults suffering from musculoskeletal disorders,

reached a conclusion strongly consistent with our research findings: dance significantly reduces overall stress, anxiety, and depression levels.

41.18% of participants stated that dance facilitates a transition from a negative to a positive mood. This view was observed particularly in participants who, despite being new to dance, experienced the immediate emotional impact of dance. 35.29% of participants expressed that dance provides both short-term and long-term happiness. Such comments primarily came from listeners of pop, rock, and classical music, suggesting that music preferences support experiences linked to emotional uplift. 23.53% considered dance a means of mental release and physical relaxation. These deeper effects were more frequently reported by individuals who had been dancing for 2 years or more.

Consistent with the research findings, Quiroga Murcia et al. (2010) state that dance not only increases happiness and positive emotions but also enhances cognitive focus. Koch et al. (2007) found that individuals who dance exhibit fewer depressive symptoms. Genç et al. (2025) reported that a 12-week dance activity increased students' happiness, and Fink et al. (2014) indicated that increased serotonin release throughout dance improves mood. The fact that a large majority of our sample group consists of women aligns with different research results in the literature. Matud (2004), in her research with women, reported that women are more likely to prefer creative ways, such as dance, to cope with emotional states. The consistency of the obtained results with the literature is noteworthy given the limitations of the research. The limitations of the study include not inquiring about participants' existing psychiatric illnesses and the self-reported nature of stress levels. In this context, the consistency of the results with the literature builds confidence in self-reported responses.

Conclusion

This research qualitatively evaluates the stress levels and emotional states of individuals regularly participating in dance activities, revealing how dance contributes to an individual's psychological well-being. The findings demonstrate that dance is more than just a physical activity; it is a life practice that strengthens individuals' mental and emotional integrity, transitions them to a positive mood, and provides inner balance. A significant portion of participants described dance as a "space of freedom," a "form of self-expression," and a "means of emotional release." The fact that individuals reporting high stress levels experienced a significant decrease in stress after dancing strongly highlights dance's therapeutic effect on stress. Furthermore, the finding that individuals experienced a transition from negative to positive emotional states through dance, and felt an increase in both short-term and long-term happiness, is one of the most striking outcomes of the research. Additionally, the research findings revealed the reflections of demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, music preferences, and detrimental behaviors on the psychological effects of dance. Specifically, findings such as the younger age group's perception of dance as a tool for identity construction and self-expression, female participants' more pronounced descriptions of dance's effect on their emotional transformations, and the stronger perception of dance's relaxing function in individuals with high stress levels, demonstrate that dance is a sensitive and flexible intervention tool adaptable to individual differences. In conclusion, this research demonstrates that dance increases individuals' happiness, strengthens their stress coping abilities, promotes optimistic outlook, and ultimately deepens their level of psychological well-being. Suggestions for future research are provided below:

Similar studies could comparatively examine the psychological effects of different dance genres (e.g., modern dance, folk dances, ballet, etc.) to investigate the potential for dance genres to create differences in psychological and emotional outcomes. Intervention studies designed for individuals diagnosed with various psychological disorders (e.g., generalized anxiety disorder, social phobia, or panic disorder) could be conducted to enrich the therapeutic aspect of the research topic. Finally, mixed-methods studies (intervention, quantitative, qualitative) could be conducted to measure the effects of dance, leading to more comprehensive and generalizable results.

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