Impact of Mindfulness-Based Psychoeducation Program on Performance Anxiety among Indian Classical Dancers

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Abstract

Performance anxiety refers to the high levels of anxiety faced by performing artists, experienced psychologically, physiologically, or behaviorally, which reduces the quality of their performance and causes immense stress. Using various techniques of mindfulness, such as the body scan and psycho-education, to bring awareness to thoughts, beliefs, and emotions has been suggested in previous studies as an effective way to reduce performance anxiety. The purpose of this paper was to examine the impact of mindfulness-based psychoeducation on performance anxiety among female Indian Classical Dancers. Nine female Indian classical dancers aged 18-25 years were included in the study. All the participants filled out the Performance Anxiety Inventory (PAI), attended the mindfulness-based psychoeducation sessions, and after a week, filled out the PAI after the intervention. The findings of the study indicated statistically significant differences between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of the participants, indicating a reduction in the level of performance anxiety of the participants after the intervention.

Keywords: Indian Classical Dance, Performance Anxiety, Mindfulness, Mindfulness-based Psychoeducation

Introduction

Performing art is a series of extensive human activities that occur in front of the audience, trying to express human emotions and experiences (Manchester, 2009). Dancers face numerous psychological and physical challenges during their training and career as professional dancers, which may affect their performance as well as overall health in an adverse manner. 12% to 26.5% of professional dancers experience some form of mental health disorder such as eating disorders, anxiety, substance use disorders, etc. (Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen, 2019). Some other issues include body image issues or negative self-imaging, dealing with competition, dealing with rejection and judgment, self-medicating habits due to stressors, and performance anxiety (Hamilton & Robson, 2006) (Schnitt, 2013).

Performance anxiety refers to a wide range of behavioral, physiological, and psychological effects of high levels of anxiety, which inhibits performance (Schnitt, 2013). Performance anxiety is caused by fear of adverse reactions from others or performance appraisal (Goodman & Kaufman, 2014). The symptoms of this anxiety may be somatic, cognitive, and/or behavioral in nature (Imogen J et al., 2010). Somatic symptoms would include heavy breathing, sweating, palpitations, etc. Cognitive symptoms would include dysfunctional thought patterns and developing irrational thoughts and unhealthy emotions, and

behavioral symptoms would include pacing, fidgeting, etc. A study conducted in 2010 revealed that the majority of dancers in that study experienced moderate performance anxiety and that 20% of the sample experienced high-performance anxiety at some point. Another study titled '*Performance Anxiety Experiences of Professional Ballet Dancers: The Importance of Control*' (Imogen J et al., 2010) suggested that cognitive anxiety was more dominant than somatic anxiety and was considered to be equally debilitative, while somatic anxiety was interpreted to be more facilitative. When a dancer experiences extreme anxiety before a performance, they will start to develop apprehensions about the performance itself. Performance anxiety can have debilitating effects on memory and self-worth and will interfere with grip and appearance during a performance (Wilson & Roland, 2002). Performance anxiety affects not only the quality of the performance but also the overall health, career, and life of a dancer (Sue Bascomb, 2019).

Evidence suggests that the coping strategies employed by dancers to manage performance anxiety are mostly self-taught (Imogen J et al., 2010). However, the same study suggests the use of various other coping strategies, one of which is practicing mindfulness. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2012) defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment." Mindfulness has also been defined as self-regulation of attention to the experience of the present moment, with an orientation characterized by curiosity, openness and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004). It also means maintaining moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment. It is mostly about being in the present.

A brief body scan is a commonly used technique to practice mindfulness. Body scanning refers to focusing on parts of the body and body sensations in a gradual sequence from the feet to the head. The body scan is one of the most effective ways to start the practice of mindfulness meditation. Through a mental scan of oneself, a person will be aware of every part of their body and notice any tension without judgment. The goal is to adapt to a person's body and notice anyone's feelings without judgment. Although many people find body scanning to be relaxing, relaxation is not the main goal. The goal is to train the mind to be more open and perceive the sensory experience, and ultimately to be more forgiving. Practicing the body scan technique regularly is proven to decrease anxiety and stress among female undergraduate students (Call et al., 2013). Practicing mindfulness has proved to improve positive qualities such as insight, awareness, and wisdom (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). According to a study conducted where mindfulness training was given to vocational dancers, it was found that mindfulness skills taught to dancers enhanced their performances (Blevins et al., 2017).

The Rationale of the Study

While considering performance anxiety, there is a huge lack of research conducted to study performance anxiety among dancers in specific. Adding to this, there is absolutely a void of the presence of research done in the Indian context for performance anxiety. Apart from adding to the existing pool of literature, the findings of this study will aid in understanding the impact of mindfulness-based psychoeducation on the performance anxiety of female Indian classical dancers.

Methods
Aim

To study the levels of performance anxiety prior to and after mindfulness-based psychoeducation among female Indian Classical Dancers.

Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant difference in the levels of performance anxiety prior to and after the mindfulness-based psychoeducation program among female Indian classical dancers.

Sample

Sample Description The sample included in this study were female Indian classical dancers in the age group of emerging adults (18 to 25 years). All the participants were professional classical dancers with more than 5 stage performance experiences as well as experience in performing on online platforms during the pandemic. Each of them also indicated moderate to high levels of performance anxiety. All the participants practiced Bharatanatyam, which is one of the Indian Classical Dance forms.

Sample Size Of the 29 responses received, 9 participants were included in the study based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria proposed.

Sampling Method The sampling methods chosen for this study were convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling. In this method, the participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study, provided they fulfill the inclusion criteria.

Tools for Data Collection

A socio-Demographic Sheet along with a consent form was initially given to the sample population to gain information about their age, gender, current location, occupation, style of dance practiced, number of years of dancing experience, and number of stage and online performances given.

Performance Anxiety Inventory was then administered to the sample population to determine their levels of performance anxiety. The scale was a 20-item questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale (1 indicated 'almost never' and 4 indicated 'almost always'). The total raw scores were then calculated simply by adding up their responses to 20 performance-related questions, and only those dancers with raw scores greater than 39, indicating moderate to high-performance anxiety, were chosen to take part in the intervention.

Mindfulness-Based Psychoeducation Program The selected participants were administered the Mindfulness-Based Psychoeducation Program through four one-hour sessions on alternate days. In these sessions, psychoeducation and discussion on various topics such as identifying anxiety-provoking emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, reframing of thoughts and beliefs, what it means to be mindful, the components of mindfulness along with the mindfulness technique of a body scan, and guided imagery were covered. Upon completion of the last session, the participants were asked to practice the body scan technique at least once every day.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was conducted to analyze the quantitative data in the study using the SPSS software.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Descriptive statistics showing the number of scores, mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores of the participants' performance anxiety before and after the intervention

	N	M	SD
Pre	9	53.333	8.0932
Post	9	42.556	4.1567

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the participant's scores on the Performance Anxiety Inventory, including mean, standard division, and minimum and maximum scores obtained before and after the administration of the mindfulness-based psychoeducation intervention. According to the table, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of performance anxiety scores before the intervention was 53.333 and 8.0932, respectively, while the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of the performance anxiety scores of the participants after the intervention was 42.556 and 4.1567 respectively. This indicates that the level of performance anxiety experienced by the sample population after the intervention was significantly lower. Also, the lowest and highest scores for performance anxiety obtained by the participants before the intervention was 41 and 68, respectively, whereas those after the intervention was 34 and 47, respectively.

Table 2

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test showing Number of Scores, Ranks, Mean Rank, Sum of Ranks, Z score, and Significance of the performance anxiety scores of the participants before and after the intervention

	Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre - Post	Negative ranks	8	5.38	43.00	-2.429	0.015
	Positive ranks	1	2.00	2.00		
	Ties	0				
	Total	9				

Table 2 shows the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, including ranks, number of scores, mean rank, and the sum of ranks. According to the table given, the total number of negative ranks was found to be 8, which indicates that from the total sample population (N= 9), 8 participants showed a lower level of performance anxiety after the intervention when compared to their pre-intervention scores. The mean and sum of the negative ranks were found to be 5.38 and 43.00, respectively. The total number of positive ranks was found to be 1, which may be interpreted as 1 participant from the total sample (N= 9) experiencing higher performance anxiety after the intervention when compared to the pre-intervention score. The mean and sum of the positive ranks were found to be 2.00 each. The z-value and the significance (p-value) of the participants' performance anxiety scores before and after the mindfulness intervention were found to be -2.429, and the p-value or the significance was found to be 0.015, which is significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion

A study conducted by Reynaud and Lynne (2016) examined the effects of experiencing performance anxiety on the quality of the performance among dancers. It was seen that experiencing performance anxiety could have debilitating effects on not only the performance of the dancers but also their attitudes towards performances, quality of life, and overall health. It also suggested the use of mindfulness practices as a coping strategy to manage performance anxiety. Blevins et. al. (2017) used the Mindfulness Commitment Acceptance approach to train vocational dancers in mindfulness skills, and the results suggested that the training enhanced the performance outcomes of the dancers. Gardner and Moore (2017) suggested that practicing mindfulness proved to improve the well-being and quality of life of sportsmen and performing artists. Additionally, performance anxiety has been proven to affect a performer's health as well as their career (Sue Bascomb, 2019), and there is a need to develop and utilize effective coping strategies to manage it. The findings of the present study are in line with the previous literature.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to the study. Firstly, the research design was inadequate due to the lack of a control group. Secondly, convenience sampling and snowball sampling was adopted for participant recruitment leading to self-selection bias. Thirdly, the participants in this study were all females, aged between 18 to 25 years, and the sample size was quite small as well. Hence, the sample bias may limit the generalizability of the findings. Fourth, the participants were not blinded to the aim of this study, which could have resulted in response bias. Fifthly, the study adopted a self-report questionnaire to measure performance anxiety, which may have induced self-reporting bias and learning effects. Lastly, the conduction of the entire study on an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic could have resulted in participants experiencing screen fatigue along with anxiety about the pandemic itself.

Suggestions for future research

There exists a dearth of future research in the areas of developing a performance anxiety scale specifically tailored to dancers, exploring the impact of performance anxiety in other aspects of a performer's life, such as self-esteem, psychological well-being, eating habits, etc. in the Indian context and exploring the difference in performance anxiety levels between male and female Indian classical dancers. Furthermore, this research was conducted on a small scale and on an online platform; large-scale research would make these findings more robust.

Conclusion

The means of the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were found to be 53.333 and 42.556, respectively, while the standard deviation for the same was found to be 8.0932 and 4.1567, respectively, indicating a lowered level of performance anxiety after the mindfulness intervention. A total of 8 participants were found to have lower performance anxiety post-the intervention, and 1 participant was found to have higher performance anxiety post the intervention. At a significance level of 0.05, the Z value was found to be -2.429, and the p-value was found to be 0.015, which can be inferred as the results being statistically significant.

The findings indicate that mindfulness-based psychoeducation produced significantly positive changes in performance anxiety levels of the sample population by helping them reduce the level of their

performance anxiety, rejecting the initial hypothesis that there will be no significant difference in the levels of performance anxiety prior to and after the intervention among female Indian Classical Dancers.

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