Research Report

Resilient Artists

How can we strengthen the mental resilience of performing artists ?

An initiative of the Department of Applied Psychology and the Royal Conservatoire of the Antwerp University College (AP Hogeschool)

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Resilient Artists is an initiative of the Department of Applied Psychology and the Royal Conservatoire of the Antwerp University College (AP Hogeschool). The goal of this research project was to perform an in-depth investigation of the various mental health challenges professional performing artists face during their studies and subsequent careers. The results of this investigation were thereafter used to develop a multidisciplinary prevention program aimed at preventing mental health issues among performing artists.

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Background

Building and maintaining a career in the performing arts can be a stressful undertaking. Professional performing artists such as musicians, dancers and actors are often faced with **significant occupational challenges** throughout their studies and subsequent careers which can in turn lead to a number of psychological and health issues. Previous research on mental health in the performing arts has focused mainly on individual disciplines. In the following paragraphs we will briefly summarize the existing mental health research for musicians, dancers and actors.

Mental health issues among musicians are already documented extensively by previous studies. Research has shown that a career as a professional musician is characterized by marked social comparison and extreme competition among peers in addition to high levels of job insecurity and financial instability (Pecen, Collins, & MacNamara, 2016; Perkins et al., 2017). Furthermore, multiple studies have shown that professional musicians experience a range of clinical or sub-clinical mental disorders (Kenny, Driscoll, & Ackermann, 2014; Vaag, Bjørngaard, & Bjerkeset, 2016; van Fenema et al., 2013; van Fenema & van Geel, 2014). In addition, a study by Vaag, Bjørngaard, & Bjerkeset (2016) showed that the prevalence of mental health issues among musicians is higher compared to the general population. Besides mental disorders, professional musicians can also suffer from musculoskeletal disorders such as overuse injuries (Bird, 2013) and musculoskeletal pain (Baadjou, 2018). Moreover, Kenny & Ackermann (2015) found that musculoskeletal disorders among musicians can also lead to an increased risk for subsequent depression. Perkins, Reid, Araújo, Clark, & Williamon (2017) argue that the relatively high rates of mental health issues among professional musicians can be directly related to their experiences of occupational stressors and challenges.

Although the research on professional dancers is somewhat more scarce compared to musicians, it is well established that dancers are also at risk of developing mental health issues due to the **high psychological and physical demands** of dancing at a professional level. Laws & Apps (2005) examined a large population of professional dancers in the United Kingdom and found that 92% of dancers reported at least one mental health issue over the course of one year. In addition, a study by Wanke, Schmidt, Leslie-Spinks J, et al. (2015) among professional dance pedagogues found that 58.6% of the respondents stated that their musculoskeletal system was strained by the physical demands of their profession. Furthermore, professional dancers also report substantial pressure to dance through pain when necessary, in order to deliver optimal performances (Grove, Main, & Sharp, 2013). Moreover, a study on injury in classical ballet dancers found that as many as 85% of study participants reported some type of dance-related physical injury within a year's time (Laws, 2005).

Background

Besides physical stress, dancers are also confronted with psychosocial stressors such as rivalry among peers, relationships with choreographers, a perceived lack of autonomy and control as well as fear of job insecurity and financial concerns (Grove, Main & Sharp, 2013; Laws & Apps, 2005; Mainwaring, Kerr & Krasnow, 1993). Another major psychological stressor among dancers is the maintenance of ideal bodyweight. For example, a study by Twitchett, Angioi, & Metsios (2008) among ballet dancers found that 31.3% of participants reported a history of disordered eating behaviors. Finally, research has shown that professional dancers are often subjected to long practice hours in combination with tight rehearsal and performance schedules which may hamper their physical and mental recovery (Twitchett, Angioi, Koutedakis & Wyon, 2010).

Finally, professional actors are a third group of performing artists that often experience **work-related physical and psychological stress**. Multiple studies have shown that professional actors are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other mental health issues compared to the general population (Maxwell, Seton, & Szabo, 2015; Robb & Due, 2018; Rob, Due & Venning, 2016). More specifically, research has shown that commonly cited psychological challenges among actors are a lack of autonomy, complex interpersonal relationships with directors and other actors, perfectionism and high self-criticism (Robb, Due & Venning, 2016). In addition, a study by Waterman (2013) found that professional actors are also vulnerable for eating disorders and substance abuse. A study by Brandfonbrener (1992) highlights additional factors that may negatively impact the wellbeing of actors including low help-seeking behavior, long working hours, sleep deprivation and the requirement to perform under all types of circumstances, even during sickness. Finally, Duck (2014) argues that the impact of these issues is often worsened when combined with a lack of secure employment.

Objectives

When reviewing the existing literature regarding mental health challenges among professional musicians, dancers and actors two things become apparent. Firstly, there seems to be very little research that compares two or more performing arts disciplines with regards to mental health challenges. Second, the existing research on musicians, dancers and actors suggest that these disciplines have many similarities with respect to the mental health challenges they face. Consequently, the **first objective** of the current study was to construct a broad conceptual framework for mental health challenges in the performing arts that is able to synthesize the existing literature on individual performing arts and to identify unique and common challenges in various performing arts disciplines. As a **second objective**, the results of this investigation were used to develop a multidisciplinary prevention program aimed at preventing mental health issues among performing artists.

Theoretical Framework

Bio-psycho-social model

Within this project, the mental health of the performing artist is conceptualized through the widely used bio-psycho-social model (Engel, 1977). The biopsychosocial approach systematically considers **biological, psychological, and social factors** as well as their complex interactions in understanding (mental) health and illnesses. The model lies at the base for the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health of the World Health Organization and is a widely used basic paradigm within Psychology as it provides a conceptual framework for identifying health-promoting and hindering factors. The main tenet of the model is that (mental) health and illness is the result of complex interactions between the biological, psychological and social dimensions of an individual (Kenny, Whittaker, & Emmery, 2016). Consequently, the interplay between these dimensions thus determines the cause, manifestation and potential resolution of (mental) illness. Importantly, unlike more traditional biomedical models, the bio-psycho-social model take the **subjective experience** of the individual into account, providing a more **holistic view** to adress (mental) health problems (Kuppens et al., 2016).
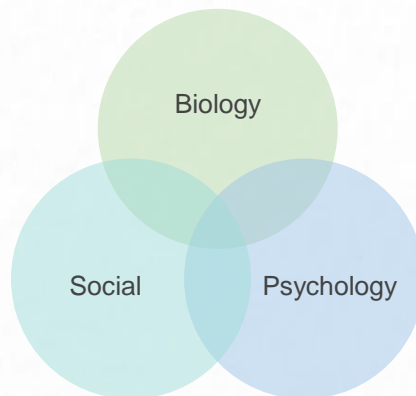

Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience can be defined as the ability of an individual to cope with or recover from challenges and stressors that pose a threat to that individual's functioning or wellbeing (Masten, 2014). The concept refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain mental and physical health despite being exposed to stressful situations. Models of psychological resilience have highlighted the importance of **adapative emotional regulation strategies** for strengthening resilience (Mestre et al., 2017). Importantly, such regulation strategies can be learned using specific and repeated exercises Prout, Malone, & Hoffman, 2019) which are an integral part of the Resilient Artists prevention program.

Theoretical Framework

Prevention

Existing research among musicians, dancers and actors firmly agree that prevention initiatives are the most effective way to diminish both physical as well as psychological injuries among professional performing artists (e.g., Kenny, Driscoll, & Ackermann, 2014; Pecen, Collins, & MacNamara, 2018; Rasim, 2015; Robb, Due, & Venning, 2018). Therefore, the current research project is not focused on curing existing psychopathologies among performing artists but rather positively oriented towards prevention. **Mental health prevention** referrers to any action or strategy aimed at limiting or reducing the incidence, prevalence and reoccurrence of mental health disorders. A crucial component of a mental health prevention framework is the promotion of personal strengths and behaviors that have the potential to serve as buffers against the development of mental health disorders, both at the individual and systemic levels. In addition, mental health prevention also refers to creating environments and living conditions that support individuals' mental health and allows them to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles. Psychological prevention strategies often use a **staged prevention concept**, differentiating between:

1. **Primary prevention:** preventing mental health problems in a general population before they start.
2. **Secondary prevention:** prevention strategies aimed at individuals with a higher risk of developing a mental disorder.
3. **Tertiary prevention:** prevention strategies aimed at helping those who already struggle with mental health issues
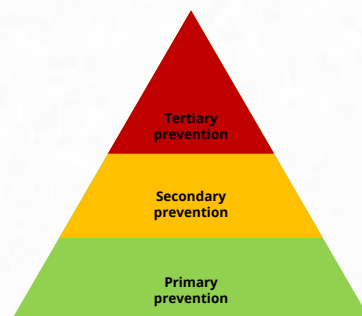
The prevention program that is detailed in this research report was conceived as a **primary prevention initiative**, aimed at preventing mental health issues among a broad and heterogenous group of performing artists (musicians, dancers, and actors).

Theoretical Framework

Psycho-education

Psycho-education is a widely used method for primary prevention initiatives and refers to any intervention that combines psychological knowledge and education to help individuals better understand and manage their mental health conditions or emotional well-being (Bäuml et al., 2006). It often consists of providing (groups of) individuals with information, resources, and tools to enhance their understanding of specific mental health issues, symptoms, treatment options, coping strategies, and self-care techniques. **The goal** of psycho-education is to empower individuals by equipping them with practical knowledge and skills to effectively manage the challenges associated with their mental health. By promoting awareness, psycho-education also aims to r**educe stigma** and **enhance overall mental well-being**. Psycho-education interventions can have several benefits for professional performing artists:

1. **Increased awareness:** psycho-education can help performing artists gain a deeper understanding of the mental health challenges commonly experienced in the music industry. It raises awareness about common issues such as perfectionism, performance anxiety and financial challenges.

2. **Improved coping strategies:** psycho-education can provide performing artists with practical tools and coping strategies to manage stress, perfectionism, performance anxiety, and other psychological challenges. Through specific exercises, performing artists can learn how to more effectively cope with the demands of their profession.

3. **Enhanced self-care strategies**: Psycho-education can be used to teach the importance of self-care practices by emphasizing the importance of spending time with friends and family, physical exercise, sleep, good nutrition, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. It helps performing artists prioritize their mental and physical health, leading to improved overall functioning.

4. **Reduced mental health stigma:** By encouraging open discussions about mental health, psycho-education can help to reduce stigma surrounding mental health challenges among performing artists and foster a supportive and understanding environment that promotes mental well-being.

5. **Support networks:** Psycho-education often takes place in group settings, providing performing artists with opportunities to connect with peers who may be experiencing similar challenges. This can create a sense of community and support, allowing individuals to share experiences, exchange advice, and provide emotional support to one another.

Methodology

The goal of this research project was to perform an in-depth investigation of the various mental health challenges professional performing artists face during their studies and subsequent careers as well as to construct a conceptual framework for common mental health challenges that are shared among musicians, dancers, and actors. Importantly, the study focused on artists' **subjective experiences** of these challenges. This implies that the results of the current research report offer an interpretation of performing artists subjective reality rather than providing an objective and generalizable truth. Consequently, the research goal was approached resolutely via a **qualitative methodology**. The data for this study was gathered through semi-structured interviews as well as diary studies and several focus groups and subsequently analyzed using inductive content analysis.

Procedure

Before data collection, a brief literature study was performed in order to summarize the existing research on mental health challenges among performing artists. Prior to the start of data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics board and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data collection subsequently occurred in **4 stages**:

1. **Exploratory interviews:** 6 experienced performing artists (2 musicians, 2 dancers and 2 actors) were interviewed and asked about the mental health challenges they were faced with in their careers. The goal of the exploratory interviews was to obtain a starting point for the development of a **semi-structured interview guide**, to be used for the main data collection.

2. **Semi-structured depth-interviews:** a total of 15 performing artists in music (n=5), dance (n=5) and drama (n=5) were recruited for conducting the semi-structured interviews. The interview sample consisted of 8 males and 7 males, aged between 18 and 60. All participants were active as professionals in their respective fields. At the time of data collection, all study participants were living either in Belgium or in the Netherlands. Given that the goal was to explore performing artists' subjective realities, the employed open-ended semi-structured interview guide allowed participants considerable flexibility with regards to their responses throughout the interview. Specific care was taken to make the interview guide discipline a-specific so that the same interview guide could be used for all participants. Participants were specifically asked regarding the perceived similarities and differences between music, dance and drama with regards to their associated mental health challenges. In addition, participants were asked about their strategies for coping with such challenges as well as about their needs for external support. The target duration for a single interview was set at around 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed and anonymized. Interviews were conducted by two different members of the research team.

Methodology

3. **Diary studies:** six participants (2 musicians, 2 dancers and 2 actors) were followed in a diary study for 6 weeks in order to gauge mental health challenges that occur in their daily lives. Each week, participants filled in a questionnaire, containing open-ended questions about the mental health challenges they are currently experiencing. For each individual participant, the diary study was concluded by one final evaluation interview.

4. **Mixed focus groups:** two additional focus groups were conducted after completion of the semi-structured interviews and the diary study. The main goal of the focus group was to go deeper into important themes that emerged from the interviews. Questions also pertained either to participants' perception of mental health challenges, coping strategies or needs for external support

> **Focus group 1:** a mixed group of 3 musicians, 4 dancers and 5 actors was recruited to discuss similar and unique mental health challenges in their disciplines. The focus group lasted 180 minutes and was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed and anonymized.

> **Focus group 2**: a mixed group of 2 musicians, 2 dancers and 2 actors that currently hold a management position within a professional artistic organization was recruited to discuss the most important needs for external support. The focus group lasted 120 minutes and was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed and anonymized.

Data analysis

The interview, diary study and focus group data were analyzed by means of **inductive content analysis** using specialized software (QSR NVIVO 11.3.0). The analysis process that was followed can be broken down in the following **stages**: reading through the interview & focus group transcripts, coding participant quotes into meaningful units and combining similar codes into emerging subthemes. During the analysis process, the coding of transcript text was regularly checked against the literature as well as the study goals in order to check if the emerging codes and themes were relevant to answer the research questions. Furthermore, a coding list containing explanations of each code was constructed as to facilitate the coding process. The steps above were executed independently by two different researchers of the research team and conflicting findings were resolved through internal discussion.

Results

The goal of the current study was two-fold: **1)** construct a broad conceptual framework for mental health challenges in the performing arts that is able to synthesize the existing literature on individual performing arts and to identify unique and common challenges in various performing arts disciplines. **2)** use this framework to develop a multidisciplinary prevention program aimed at preventing mental health issues among performing artists.

Mental Health Challenges

Common challenges

Results showed that common mental health challenges between musicians, dancers and actors could be broadly grouped into three main categories: **psychological challenges,** **environmental challenges** and **physical challenges**. We will discuss the most prevalent challenges for each category in turn.
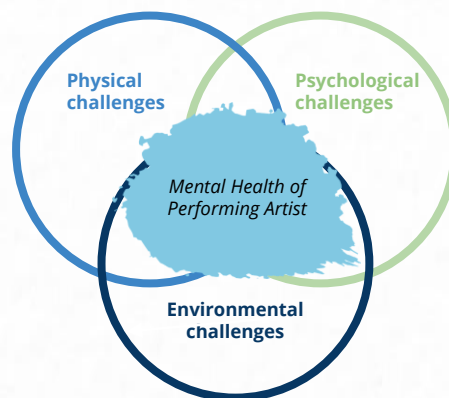
Psychological challenges refer to the various issues and struggles individuals may encounter within their thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and behaviours (Minghetti et al., 2018). These challenges may arise from factors such as personal experiences, environmental influences, genetic predispositions, or a combination of these factors.

Environmental challenges refer to various external factors and circumstances that can pose obstacles, difficulties, or constraints to performing artists' mental wellbeing. These challenges are typically related to the broader environment in which musicians operate, including social relations, cultural context and economic conditions

Physical challenges refer to the various physical demands and potential issues that arise from working as a performing artist. These challenges can impact artists' physical well-being, performance abilities, and overall health and can manifest in different ways depending on the artistic discipline.

Results

It is important to emphasize that these psychological, environmental, and physical challenges are tightly **interconnected** and can **interact** with each other in complex ways, significantly impacting a performing artist's mental health. For example, environmental challenges such as financial instability can intensify psychological challenges such as stress and anxiety. Another example would be that physical challenges such as pain, fatigue or injuries can exacerbate psychological challenges.

Psychological Challenges

1) Perfectionism

This challenge was widely cited among musicians, dancers and actors and refers to the psychological need to strive for flawlessness and perfection in their respective art disciplines.

> *"If you're performing for a live audience, I believe you should always give it a 100%. Your artistic product is never finished, it can always be improved which is sometimes very frustrating. Even when you're already on tour with the production you are obliged to try and improve yourself every day."*

Participants mentioned three underlying causes for their perfectionism. Firstly, they referred to the fact that the fields of music, dance and drama all have a **long-standing tradition** of praising flawless technique and stellar performances which puts artists under tremendous pressure to perform well and incites a strong sense of perfectionism. Secondly, participants referred to the very **competitive nature** of a profession in the performing arts and difficulty of obtaining paying jobs which increases the need to be an excellent performer. Thirdly, participants mentioned **perfectionism as a personality trait** they identify with strongly. Fear of failure was cited as the most important negative outcome of perfectionism.

> *"In many cases you can't afford to make any mistakes. Everything has to be as perfect as possible. People are very quickly to judge... there are so many people in the audience, everyone with their own opinions. I quickly get a sense of guilt when I make a mistake, as if I messed things up completely."*

Results

2) Performance Anxiety

A second challenge, shared between musicians, dancers and actors that was widely cited is performance anxiety.

> *"It's a feeling I remember very well from my conservatory years. Before every performance I used to get physical symptoms: I started feeling sick, started to sweat like crazy, etc. It got to a point where I asked myself: why am I doing this? This has got to stop because it's not fun anymore."*

In general, participants reported **three different determining factors** to their performance anxiety. Firstly, participants referred to their own personality traits as a contributing factor to their performance anxiety, regardless of the performance situation. Secondly, participants referred to the difficulty of the task at hand with more difficult tasks eliciting a higher level of performance anxiety. Thirdly, participants indicated that some performance situations are more prone to elicit anxiety than others. For example, participants felt more anxiety for solo performances in comparison to ensemble performances. Participants indicated that performance anxiety can elicit physiological symptoms such as nervousness, sweating, increased heart rate and nausea but also cognitive symptoms such as decreased concentration and memory lapses.

3) Competition among peers

Both musicians, dancers and actors frequently referred to their perception that a career in the performing arts is very competitive and entails a lot of internal competition among peers. The **difficult economic circumstances** and the **scarcity of paid jobs** were cited as the main causes of internal competition.

> *"Part of the problem is that, when there's a vacancy for one position in an orchestra, there are over 150 applicants from all over Europe, creating an enormous competition for that one spot."*

Participants indicated that this sense of competition typically already starts in the first year of conservatory educations as students realize that everyone in their class is as skilled and talented as they are.

> *"A lot of acting students feel a strong pressure to compete with one another in their first year. This sense of competitiveness subsides a bit in later years but the pressure to perform remains high as students are constantly asking themselves if they are good enough."*

Results

With regards to **auditioning**, participants indicated that favoritism plays a substantial role in securing a job.

> *"You are often auditioning for a group of people who already know each other very well: the artistic director, members of the company, etc. This often creates an atmosphere of favoritism where the selection does not happen based on merit but based on who is friends with who."*

> *"In auditions, there's often a tendency to choose for people that are already well known in the industry rather than basing the choice solely on the quality of the audition.."*

Participants also mentioned the **negative effect of social media** on social comparison and competition among peers.

> *"If you are struggling in your career and then you see on Facebook or other social media that your peers are doing very well in their careers, it makes you feel even worse."*

4) Intertwinement of personal and artistic identity

Another shared psychological challenge between musicians, dancers and actors is the strong intertwinement of their personal and artistic identity. More specifically, all participants reported a very high level of **personal identification with their respective art disciplines**. One the one hand, this provides them with a high level of motivation and a deep sense of meaning in their work.

> *"Ultimately, we work a horrendous amount of hours for a low wage not because we like being taken advantage of but out of passion and love for our job. We as artists are so grateful that we get to do this job that it's sometimes hard to protect your personal boundaries."*

On the other hand, performing artists feel so intertwined with their work that they do not consider exiting their profession as a viable option, even when their careers are not going as they had hoped. Participants felt that exiting the profession would equal as losing a part of their personal identity.

> *"A career in this business is very demanding, both mentally and physical. Yet, I cannot bring myself to quit, I just have to do it."*

Results

Environmental Challenges

1) Financial- and job insecurity

Every single participant in the music, dance and drama categories made explicit reference to the **unfavorable economic circumstances** in their respective disciplines, resulting in widespread financial and job insecurity among performing artists.

> *"As a performer, you can be hired to do a certain production, but if the subsidies are not approved, the production will be cancelled. You've then cleared your schedule to do the production only to be out of work for an entire month. As an artist, you're often not protected against such scenario's. Some artistic organizations even cease to exist because of budget cuts in subsidies. A friend of mine lost her job for exactly this reason."*

Many participants reported that they often work for sub-standard wages out of fear of not being hired again by the same organizations for future jobs:

> *"I did so many productions for very little pay. I thought to myself: if I just do this one job, people won't forget me and I can stay in rotation for future jobs with better pay. However, ultimately you just end up working very hard all the time for very little money."*

An emerging sub-challenge participants reported is the unfavorable and complex legal statute under which professional performing artists are required to work in Belgium.

> *"The legal working statutes for performing artists are currently changing and a lot of artists are being negatively affected by the sheer complexity of this whole system. Most artists rarely have a fixed contract but work freelance from project to project. Some people can deal with this and enjoy the freedom and autonomy it brings but others cannot and eventually choose another career path"*

2) Combining multiple jobs

Another common challenge among musicians, dancers and actors is the fact they often make a living from combining several jobs and teaching positions. This typically creates a complex logistical puzzle making it harder for artists to maintain these multiple positions in a healthy and sustainable way.

> *"Combining all my job appointments is often hard. My main appointment is often not flexible and I have to attend a lot of meetings. On top of that I have to study my scores and constantly make adjustments to my schedule in order to fit in new projects. I'm occupied with my job almost 24/7."*

Results

"Making up my schedule is often a big source of stress for me and I see it among colleagues too. You have very few dancers who work for only one dance company. That almost doesn't exist anymore. People often combine multiple assignments, but the problem is that a lot of projects regularly get cancelled which leaves you with a very uncertain and constantly changing work schedule"

"If you're not willing to combine multiple gigs, you'll find yourself sitting at home without work. I see it often with young people; they performed an excellent final exam, receive their diploma and then wait for the job opportunities to come to them. Those days are over…"

Furthermore, next to combining multiple jobs, participants also mentioned the necessity to have a **versatile and multidisciplinary skillset** in order to thrive as an artist.

"These days, not being willing to deal with things such as administration and marketing is unacceptable as a performing artist. In the meantime, entrepreneurship has become an important part of artistic curriculums. It's become a part of basic training".

3) Sustaining a long-term career

Participants made reference to the challenge of sustaining a long-term career within the performing arts. More specifically, sustaining a long career entails continuously searching for new assignments over the course of many years which can take a physical and psychological toll on performing artists. Furthermore, to sustain a durable career, artists must maintain their skills at a top-level for years on end in order to stand a chance at auditions.

"Where do you have to keep finding motivation to rehearse frequently and keep your level top notch in order to participate in auditions from time to time? This is a big challenge for a lot of performing artists."

Participants also referred to the impact of ageing on artists' efforts to sustain a long-term career.

"You never really get used to the pressure of being on stage and it can get worse with ageing; although the quality always has to perfect, your body and physical attributes steadily deteriorate when getting older."

Results

In addition, participants mentioned the detrimental impact of the professional career on artists' friends- and family relations.

> *"Regarding friends and family, not everyone understands that as an artists you often have to work weekends and at night. People sometimes hold it against you that it's difficult for you to attend social events."*

> *"As a child, I've always said I wanted to be on a stage and I have persevered with this dream. My career has always been my top priority at the cost of everything else. However, with getting older, I now realize that family relationships are getting increasingly important."*

4) Building a professional Network

The importance of networking to receive job opportunities was frequently cited as an important challenge among musicians, dancers and actors.

> *"Networking is perhaps the most important thing. You can be a great performer or choose unprecedented music and make it performance-ready, but the network brings together the right people who can perform it and the right people who can program it and eventually record it as a CD."*

Conservatory educations are typically seen as a good starting point for building such a network whereas self-taught artists usually experience more difficulties in this respect.

> *"There has to be a professional and personal network, that's a very important thing. Those who have graduated from a formal education are already doing so during their conservatory years. Artists who are self-taught have to try and create their network in a different way and have to spend a lot of time looking for contacts. A lot of artists underestimate the time it takes to build a good network, which can take up to 10 years."*

5) Dealing with negative feedback

Another shared challenge between musicians, dancers and actors is dealing with negative feedback throughout their careers. More specifically, participants identified **three sources** of potential negative feedback: teacher, auditions and critics

Results

Firstly, participants mentioned negative feedback from teachers as a considerable source of stress during their studies

> *"I know a lot of stories about students who lost all of their study-motivation due to constant negative feedback from their teachers. With some teachers you have to be very sure of yourself in order not to be discouraged."*

Secondly, participants referred to negative feedback they receive at auditions

> *"It's normal to do a lot of auditions where you will fail far more often than you will succeed. Nevertheless, receiving negative feedback at auditions is quite difficult as it can start weighing on your self-confidence."*

Thirdly, participants mentioned negative reviews from professional critics as a source of negative feedback:

> *"The thing is: positive reviews are nice to read but you forget about them two days after. However, negative reviews can keep lingering on in your head forever."*

6) Mental Health Taboo

Participants indicated that they still experience a taboo on talking about mental health in many conservatories and artistic organizations. More specifically, a lot of artists are afraid to openly talk about mental health issues out of **fear of being evaluated negatively** by others.

> *"It's a problem that some students tend to hide their mental issues in order not to look weak towards their teachers"*

> *"I get the impression that a lot of artists don't talk about their problems. I'm not sure if it's really taboo but everyone seems to deal with their issues privately and just do what is expected from them without complaining too much. The thing is, if you're afraid to talk about your problems, things often get worse, it depends somewhat on the individual"*

Results

In addition, this mental health taboo is also maintained due to internal competition between peers:

> *"The thing is: even though we're all friends and hanging out with each other, we still all want that one perfect job. There's a lot of camaraderie but in the end we're all fending for ourselves and in that respect it's very difficult to be vulnerable and talk openly about mental health."*

In general, participants made frequent references to an implicit social convention within the performing arts to keep up appearances, not show weakness and deal with personal problems privately.

7) Negative societal perceptions

Participants mentioned that they did not feel particularly valued by a society that is determined by rationalism and economic motives.

> *"I get the feeling that a lot of people think that artists are just a bunch of crybabies who do not deserve to be adequately financially compensated for practicing what is 'just' a 'hobby'. Rather, we're just people who can be asked to play at random events for free, just because we like doing it... so oftentimes, we're not really taken seriously."*

In addition, participants indicated they felt they had to actively defend their choice of a career in the performing arts to friends and family who often do not consider it as a worthwhile profession.

> *"I regularly have to justify myself towards my family who are not artists. It's very difficult to explain to them that this type of career is very hard work and not just a hobby."*

8) Power relationships

This challenge refers to power relationships between people in the performing arts industry. Participants held negative attitudes towards the way power is assigned and exercised in the industry, emphasizing that oftentimes, factors other than talent or hard work determined your career success. In general, participants made a distinction between people in the industry with power and people without power.

Results

Some participants referred to a **strict power hierarchy** between a performer on the one hand and a superior on the other hand.

> *"It's all about hierarchy. It already starts at the audition process: you're standing there almost naked, like a piece of meat. Then you're hired but you're not entitled to your own opinion. It often takes years until you're allowed to say something for yourself. People take advantage of the fact that you're scared of being fired and thus will agree to almost anything."*

In addition, participants referred to situations where the boundary between work life and private life get very blurry and the stage is set for transgressive behavior on the part of supervisors.

> *"I used to work for a choreographer where the working environment could get quite problematic. There were no scheduled endings for rehearsals which often continued until after midnight. Then, the choreographer started drinking, a lot of things happened that were not ok. You want to do a good job so you eventually become a victim of this abusive behavior."*

Participants felt that protection of their personal boundaries against transgressive behavior was very important for their mental health but difficult to achieve in a lot of situations.

> *"It's not easy at all. On the one hand you have to have an open mind to step into the world of the person in charge. On the other hand: you can't let them take advantage of you and let them step over your personal boundary. But where is that boundary? In which cases am I just an employee and in which cases also a friend?"*

Furthermore, participants stated that, in the event that transgressive behavior by a superior did occur, most victims were afraid to talk about it out of fear of repercussions by the superior.

> *"The problem is that most people are afraid to talk about it. I've worked under a superior who followed me to my home and tried to get me drunk several times. I went to the management and that person eventually got fired. Afterwards, it turned out he was doing that with multiple persons who were afraid to come forward."*

Results

Physical Challenges

1) Physical injuries

With regard to the challenge of physical injuries we should make a clear distinction between musicians on the one hand and dancers and actors on the other hand due to the **differences in biomechanical nature** of these art disciplines. Participants from the music category reported having dealt with injuries concerning the biomechanics of the arms, hands, mouth and neck whereas participants from the dance and drama categories reported a wider range of injuries involving the whole body.

Musician participants often referred to overuse syndromes in the hands and arms as well as physical tension in the shoulders and neck as well as voice problems for singers. Furthermore, they referred to overuse of the mouth and lips for woodwind players.

> *"As a pianist I had an overuse injury of my thumb due to repeating the same movement over and over again. Stress is also a part of it, the more stress you have, the easier it is to develop such an injury."*

> *"I know a lot of orchestra players with really bad tension in their shoulders and neck because of long rehearsals and concerts."*

> *"A good friend of mine who is a horn soloist had an overuse injury of the lips. The flexibility of the mouth muscles is very delicate and has to be maintained really well in order not to develop problems."*

In addition, they stated that musicians typically are inclined to just play through the pain and wait far too long to deal with physical problems out of fear of not being considered professional.

> *"A lot of musicians wait far too long to seek help for their physical issues. They just think it'll disappear by itself. It's also because they want to be as professional as possible: they don't want to report in sick and not participate in the project because they are having some physical issues."*

Participants in the dance and drama categories generally referred to the **stringent physical requirements** that are placed upon them with long and intensive rehearsals, making them vulnerable to exhaustion and injury.

Results

"At one point I was dancing in three different companies at the same time. Eventually I got so exhausted that my body couldn't handle it anymore and started to break down. I had no energy and no connection with my body whatsoever. In the end, I had to seek medical attention over an extended period of time in order to get well again."

"Acting is such a physically demanding career. With almost every production I did, I eventually got some type of physical injury I had to recover from. That's why it's very important to take good care of your body."

Furthermore, similar to the musician participants, they also referred to **feeling pressured** by their environment to keep on performing when injured or in pain.

"I had to undergo surgery where they put a steel plate and bolts in my arm. I had to rehabilitate for a year but in the meantime I was still involved in productions that had to keep going. So 14 days after the surgery I was already back on the stage."

2) Lifestyle & nutritional practices

Participants referred to the importance of a healthy lifestyle and nutritional practices in order to perform well.

"In my first two years at the conservatory, I was going out a lot. At one point, my voice teacher told me I had to change that and start taking good care of myself: getting enough sleep, exercising, cutting back on alcohol and eating healthy because all of that has an impact on your voice. From that moment on, I really turned my lifestyle around

Results

Unique Challenges

Despite an extensive number of shared challenges between musicians, dancers and actors, results also showed that the specific challenges that individual performing artists are face with are heavily dependent on the **specific position that the artist occupies within the working field**. More specifically, the most important **individual factors** were the following:

1) Instrument & genre

Both, in music, dance and drama, the **genre** in which artists are active is determining for specific challenges that might arise. Jazz musicians for example operate in different **cultural environments** than classical musicians, leading to a different set of unique challenges. In a similar vein, ballet dancers have slightly different unique challenges than contemporary dancers due to the difference in genre and cultural environment

Within music, the **instrument** that one plays is also an important individual factor: different types of instrumentalists as well as singers are each in their own **niche** that has it's own set of typical challenges. For example, brass players might be more concerned with the pressure and performance anxiety that comes with playing exposed solo passages within a big orchestral piece whereas a tutti violin player does not have to deal with such challenges.

2) Age & years of experience

Age is also an important individual factor: results showed that there is a world of difference between a young conservatory graduate, at the start of his/her career and a seasoned performing artist, with many years of experience. In general, young performing artists struggle more with financial challenges and gaining career opportunities whereas more experienced performing artists struggle more with challenges related to sustaining a long term career as well as physical challenges.

Results

Unique Challenges

3) Working conditions (fixed contract vs. freelance artist)

The **working conditions** that performing artists are exposed to in their professional environment can have an impact on the way unique challenges are experienced. For example, an orchestra player with a permanent contract is less likely to experience financial insecurity and does not have to constantly audition for new projects whereas a freelance musician does experience these challenges. Furthermore, unique challenges are also influenced by the fact that artistic organizations often differ in their **organizational culture** as well as the **support initiatives** they make available for their employees.

4) Personal/family situation

The family situation of a performing artist is a significant determining factor for the unique challenges that performing artists experience. Some artists have a supportive and nurturing family environment which can be beneficial for coping with mental health challenges whereas other do not. In contrast, artists with families struggle more with maintaining a healthy work life balance compared to artists without partners and/or children. The family situation of a performing artist also has financial implications: is one the sole financial provider for the family or can one also rely on the income of a significant other? In general: every family situation is unique and will influence the way mental health challenges are experienced.

5) Personality characteristics

Finally, personal characteristics of the performing artist play a significant role in how unique challenges are experienced. Firstly, individual personality traits determine how artistis perceive and respond to mental health challenges in their profession. Secondly, some artists are naturally more resilient and resistant to stress than others, creating more variability in how unique mental health challenges are experienced. Thirdly, each artist has had an individual career path as well as past experiences that are unique to that individual and that also determines some the unique mental health challenges that person will be faced with.

Results

Discipline-specific challenges

In this section we will discuss some examples of discipline-specific challenges for musicians, dancers or actors: challenges that are very typical for a specific discipline and unlikely to occur in another discipline.

Music

1) Self-medication for performance situations
A challenge that only musicians mentioned was self-medication for optimal performance during a concert or audition.

> *"There are plenty of musicians who take beta blockers to counteract shaking hands during concerts or auditions. This is not ok and it's not really spoken about publicly but it's something that I often hear about."*

2) Solo players versus tutti players
Musicians mentioned the important difference between being a solo player or a tutti player in an orchestra with regards to performing under pressure.

> *"For example, take brass soloists in an orchestra. They often have to wait a very long time in the piece before they can play their solo. And at that moment they only have one chance to do it right. This is totally different than a violinist in the tutti section who has the luxury to play in a big group. When you play solo, all eyes and ears are on you which brings about tremendous pressure."*

3) Hearing damage
Musicians mentioned the important difference between being a solo player or a tutti player in an orchestra with regards to performing under pressure.

Dance

1) Short-lived careers
Dance participants mentioned that, because of the high physical strain they endure, they are subjected to a quite short-lived career. Consequently, retirement from the dance world at a relatively young age typically marks a big psychological shift among dancers.

> *"When I had to retire from dancing I went to see a psychologist because the life change was so overwhelming."*

Results

However, some dancers cope with forced retirement by looking out for other artistic opportunities.

> *"I had mixed feelings when retiring from professional dancing. On the one hand I was feeling fearful and thinking: is this it? On the other hand I didn't want to stop being an artist, I could still do other things and set other goals."*

2) Eating disorders

Dance participants also referred to the extreme focus on weight and consequently the frequent occurrence of eating disorders in their field.

> *"A colleague of mine has been dealing with anorexia for the past 10 years, ever since she started taking dance lessons as a young girl. It's getting better now but she still hasn't quite conquered it. It's frightening that these young girls are put under so much pressure to look good."*

Drama

1) Identity blurring

A unique challenge actors mentioned was the blurring between one's personal identity and one's character identity as actors are trained to connect with the emotions and behavioral patterns of their scripted character.

> *"During a period of 3 to 4 months I gradually take on a fictitious personality. That's not something you can just shake off after the final take or show. It's a whole new mindset that you've internalized and you need time to shake it off again afterwards."*

> *"You cannot completely lose the character until the tour is completely over. My character was not a particularly happy person… so I gave myself time to get myself out of that place. "*

> *"I gradually developed my character, and this also had physical consequences for me, although they were probably invisible to others. I constantly felt tensions and cramps at the end of the production. I really needed external help to cope with it."*

2) De-roling

A unique challenge actors mentioned was the blurring between one's personal identity and one's character identity as actors are trained to connect with the emotions and behavioral patterns of their scripted character.

Results

Coping strategies

Participants were also asked about the coping strategies they employ to handle psychological, environmental or physical challenges.

1) Family and friends

Family and friends were mentioned as a major source of coping among musicians, dancers and actors.

> *"Having a family is tremendously helpful for me. For example, I know that, when I get home, they are always going to be there for me and I need that sense of security. Especially when the kids were still small, it helped me to put my artistic issues into perspective and focus on my responsibilities towards my family."*

Financial support from family and friends can also help to advance the careers of some artists whereas others have less opportunities in this regard.

> *"An artist I know has a girlfriend with a well-paid job who can support him financially. A lot of other artists don't have that luxury; for example if you're single or if you come from a low income family. Those type of artists are way more vulnerable than others."*

2) Physical activity, Mindfulness & meditation

Musicians, dancers and actors made frequent reference to the importance of physical activity for coping with stress and anxiety. In addition, mindfulness and meditation were also mentioned as effective ways of relieving stress.

> *"Mindfulness is something that really helps me. It offers a way to cope with stress and uncertainty. I also practice meditation and that too makes a difference, even it's only 10 minutes a day."*

3) Personalized psychological strategies

Many of the interviewed participants referred to personalized psychological strategies they developed for themselves to cope with negative emotions & stress. These strategies are based on their personal experiences throughout their career paths as well as self-reflection.

Results

Some strategies focused on building psychological resilience:

"To be a resilient artist you have to be able to accept criticism but convert it to something that you can work on. Whenever I get criticism from someone I ask myself: what can I do with this information, how can I use it to improve myself. For me this is a very powerful strategy."

Other strategies focused on separating successes and failures from your self-worth as an artist:

"One thing you have to learn as an artist is that everything you think about yourself is not necessarily true. A lot of artists believe they have to do something exceptional in their careers and let their self-worth depend upon their success. If you think like that, it often goes wrong. You have to be able to deal with failures and criticism and if you let it diminish your self-worth, you're only giving yourself more stress."

Participants also mentioned strategies focused on dealing with auditioning:

"It's a shame that you don't learn properly about auditioning as a student; with getting a hard 'no' and how to deal with that. At first, it hurts; you didn't get the job and you cry. That's ok but you can't just say in a corner and cry about how you're not good enough. As a dancer you have to realize that you weren't good enough for a particular person or a particular situation. It's also a matter of taste and when you finally realize that, you can process it differently."

4) Seeking professional help
Participants also cited seeking professional help such as consulting doctors, psychologists or physical therapists as a frequently employed coping strategy.

Results

Needs & wishes for external support

Participants were also asked about their needs and wishes with regards to external support initiatives.

1) Prevention is key!
The study participants indicated that active prevention initiatives from the professional field and artistic organizations were considered very important to monitor their own mental health and that people are very receptive to all support initiatives in this area.

> *"Mental health prevention is really vital for us performers because it enables you to proactively address potential issues before they escalate. I wish there would be more attention for this in conservatories and artistic organizations, especially for young artists."*

2) Education & sensibilisation
Secondly, participants indicated a desire to receive more education and awareness about mental health and the various mental health challenges that performing artists can be faced with.

> *"A lot of performing artists don't really have a lot of knowledge about mental health but just think about it intuitively. Receiving a more formal education about the science behind mental health and how you can improve it would be very useful for a lot of people in the field."*

3) Safety nets within artistic organizations
Thirdly, the importance of safety nets within artistic organizations was underlined. Such safety nets can provide a safe and confidential environment in which to come forward with potential mental health issues.

> *"After you graduated, you're suddenly all out on your own. If you want some type of external support, it's up to you to figure it out and get it. There really should be a lot more safety nets within artistic organizations that are easily accessible and that you can turn to when you're dealing with certain issues. Of course, there are already some but there's still a lot of room for improvement."*

Results

4) Specialized psychological support

Fourthly, participants indicated the need for access to specialized psychological support by people who have a background as a mental health professional as well as a background as a performing artist

> *"I used to see a psychologist to work on some problems I had, but he was not a musician, so he didn't really understand the things I was going through, and I stopped the sessions for that reason. It would be a real luxury to have a psychologist that really knows the ins and outs of the artistic world."*

Prevention Program

Main concept

The prevention program was informed by one the one hand existing psychological theories on mental resilience (e.g., Ahern, Ark, & Byers, 2008; Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Hu, Zhang, & Wang, 2015; O'Dougherty-Wright, Masten, Narayan, Goldstein & Brooks, 2023; Seligman, 1990; Zimmerman, 2013) and on the other hand the results from the 4-stage datacollection regarding mental health challenges & needs of performing artists.

Psychological theories of resilience

Mental health challenges & needs of performing artists

Resilient Artist model
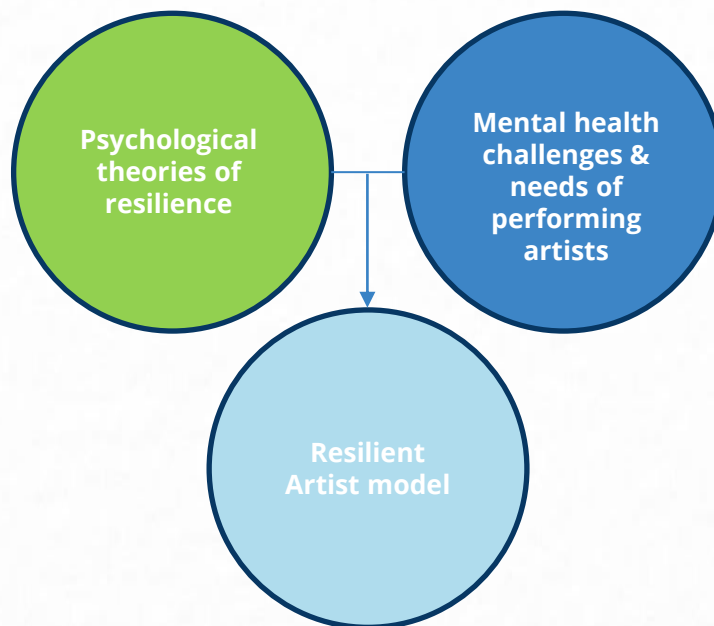
The combination of these two bodies of knowledge resulted in the so-called **Resilient Artist model**: a theoretical framework aimed at conceptualizing the mental resilience in 7 distinct aspects. The model can be regarded as a translation of existing resilience models to the lives of performing artists, taking into account the unique challenges that they are faced with.

Through these 7 different aspects of mental resilience, the Resilient Artist model provides a comprehensive framework that acknowledges and addresses the unique challenges faced by performing artists. Hence, It can serve as a guide for performing artists that want to strengthen their mental resilience.
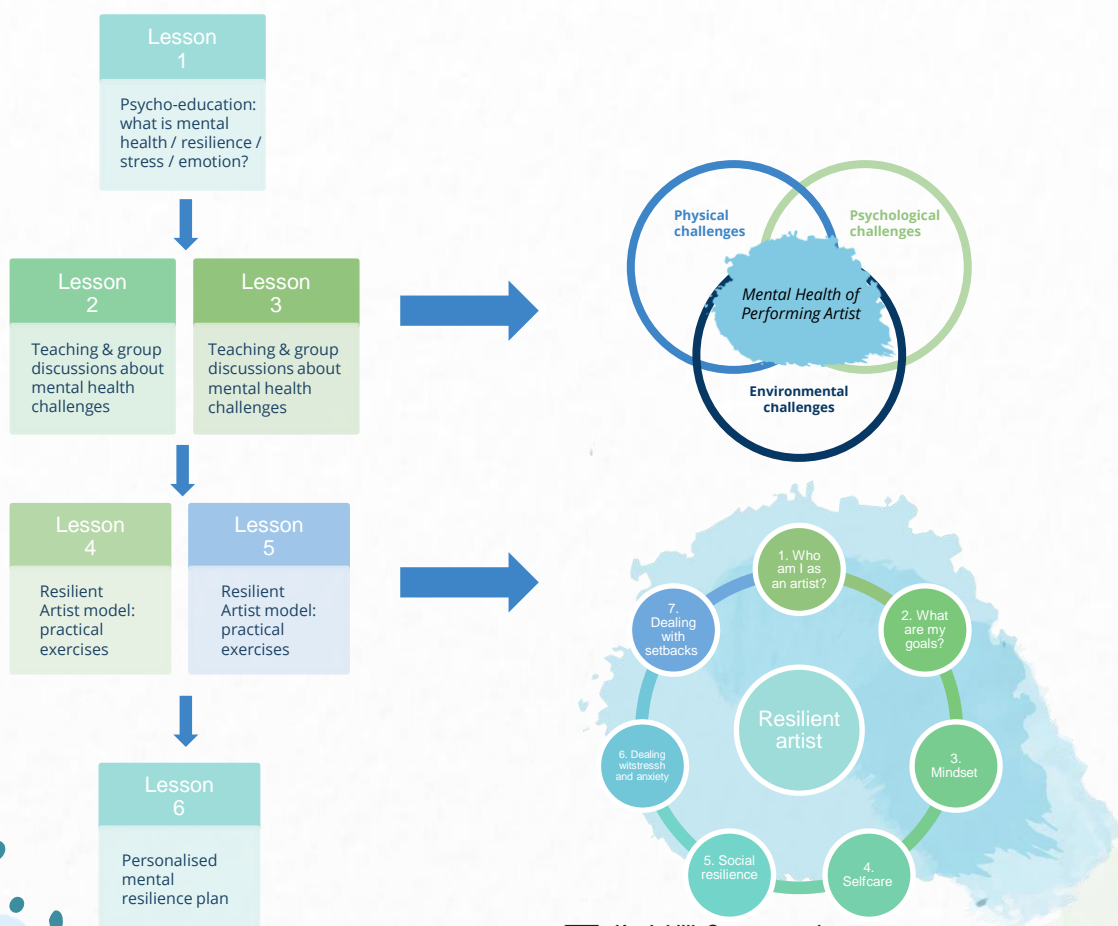
Prevention Program

Six Lesson structure

To strengthen the mental resilience of performing artists, the prevention program consists of three main components:

1. Psycho-education: prevention program participants are given information and resources to enhance their understanding of specific mental health issues (as well as how stress and emotions work) with the goal to equip them with evidence-based psychological knowledge to effectively manage the challenges associated with their mental health.

2. Teaching mental health challenges & coping strategies from the performing arts literature: program participants are taught about the various psychological, environmental and physical challenges that performing artists can face in their studies and subsequent careers.

3. Practical exercises based on well-established psychological theories: in order to learn effective coping techniques, program participants are given practical exercises inspired by various well-established psychological theories such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, growth mindset theory and self-determination theory.

These three components are encompassed in a six, two-hour lesson structure in small groups of 15 to 20 people. The structure and contents of the lessons are depicted schematically below.

Prevention Program

Resilient Artist model

The core of the prevention program is focused on strengthening these 7 different aspects of mental resilience as a performing artist:


1. Who am I as an artist?

This aspect refers to improving self-reflection skills in order to promote self-awareness about potential psychological challenges and to learn how to connect such experiences to scientifically-based knowledge about mental health.

Within this aspect, the program focusses on achieving the following three goals with the program participants.

1. Increasing self-knowledge
2. Learning self-reflection tools
3. Thinking about your own strengths and pitfalls

To this end, participants do practical self-reflection exercises based on the A-B-C model (Sarracino et al., 2017) as well as Core Quadrant theory (Ofman, 2004) for discovering their own strengths and pitfalls.

ABC model: the basic tenet behind the ABC model is that "external events (A) do not cause emotions (C), but (irrational) beliefs (B) in fact do. Through guided exercises, participants learn that emotions and behaviors are not directly determined by life events but rather by the way that these events are perceived and cognitively processed.
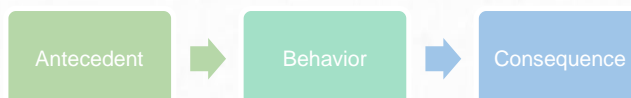
Prevention Program

Resilient Artist model

Core quadrant theory: Ofman's theory on core quadrants constitutes a method for identifying and strengthening an individual's positive traits. In this context, a core quality is regarded as an individual's specific strength, something he/she is good at, or for which he is often praised by others. When core qualities are identified, they automatically lead to the associated pitfalls, challenges and allergies.
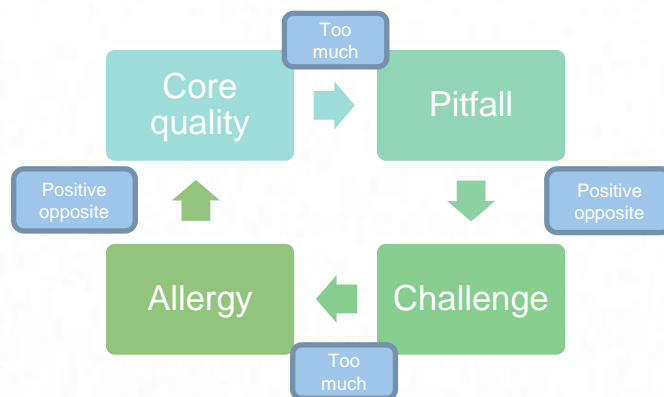
Through specific exercises, putting this theory into practice, program participants learn how to identify their own strengths & weaknesses as well as a clearer picture of their own personality.

2. What are my goals?

Here, the focus lies on learning efficient goal setting, creating a personal definition of success and to consider a cost-benefit analysis when working towards certain goals in your artistic career. Within this aspect, program participants are also required to complete goal setting exercises using the SMARTER-principle.
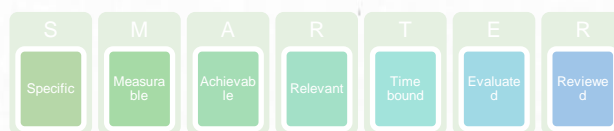

3. Mindset

For this aspect the goal is to learn to adopt a psychologically healthy mindset for pursuing a career in the performing arts. Here, the course focusses on promoting a growth mindset (rather than a fixed one), counteracting negative self-talk and learning about cognitive biases when it comes to thinking about oneself.

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Prevention Program

Through guided exercises, program participants learn how to promote a growth mindset within themselves leading to positive psychological outcomes such as feeling empowered to reach their goals, accepting setbacks as part of the learning process, having trust in their abilities to improve gradually over time and embracing flaws and mistakes as opportunities for growth.

Fixed mindset vs. growth mindset

Fixed mindset   **Growth mindset**
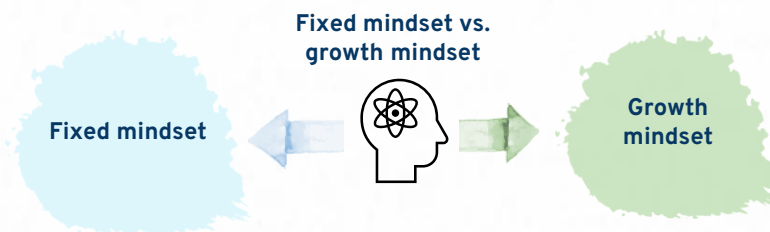
Another set of exercises is focused on reducing negative self-talk. In this part of the course, the well widely used method of 'putting your thoughts on trial' (cf. CBT) is used to learn program participants how to challenge their own negative thoughts and examine if they are correct. In addition, the program teaches about several cognitive biases that humans suffer from in their thinking patterns. Participants are also taught about locus of control theory (Zimbardo, 1985) , explaining to them that one can adopt two different mindsets: either an external locus (actions are contingent on events outside our personal control) of control or internal locus of control (actions are contingent on what we do).

Locus of control

External   **Internal**
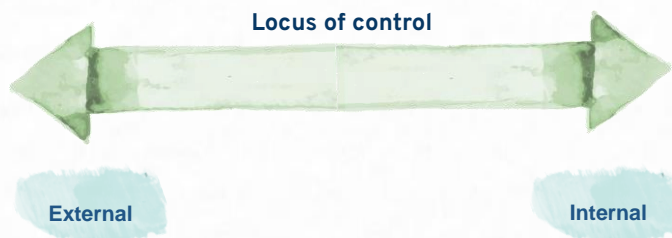
4. Self-care

Here, the course teaches how to create a personalized self-care routine that allows to efficiently cope with psychological stressors that performing artists encounter in their daily lives. Personal self-care is a process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote holistic health and well-being of the self. t is a multidimensional, multifaceted process of purposeful engagement in strategies that promote healthy functioning and enhance well-being. Effective self-care practice involves self-awareness, self-compassion, and the implementation of a variety of strategies across physical, social, inner self-care domains. Through group discussion and guided exercises, the program participants learn how to define self-care routines for themselves.
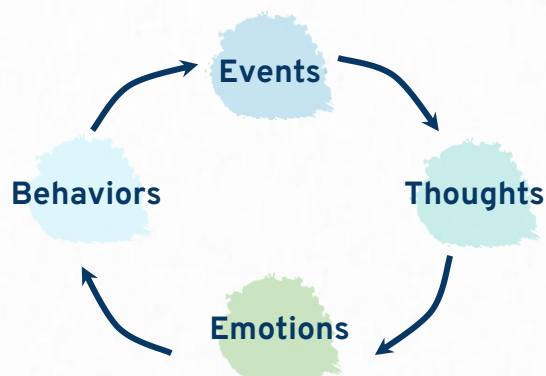
Prevention Program

5. Social resilience

This aspect refers to learning how to be mentally resilient, specifically with respect to social relationships within the career such as relationships with fellow performing artists, relationships with teachers and relationships with supervisors/superiors. Here, the program uses self-determination theory to explain that all healthy social relationships as a performing artist should fulfil three basic psychological needs: the need for autonomy or the ability to make your own choices; the need for competence or the feeling of mastery and being effective in one's activities and the need for relatedness or the need to feel connected and belonged with others.

6. Dealing with stress and anxiety

Here, the focus lies on learning about the underlying working mechanisms of stress and anxiety and on utilizing this knowledge to cope with it effectively. Participants are taught that stress is a biopsychological reaction to your environment and can be modulated by breaking with dysfunctional thought patterns. To this end, participants learn about the intricate and reciprocal relationships between thoughts, emotions and behaviours utilizing frameworks from cognitive behavioural therapy.

Prevention Program

7. Dealing with setbacks

The last aspect of the prevention program focusses on what to do when you are confronted with setbacks and things don't go as planned. What can you do when certain problems have already arisen? Here, the program relies on attribution theory, focussing on the question: how can you analyse the cause of certain setbacks and make a distinction between setbacks you have some control over and setbacks you don't have any control over. In this part of the course, participants make exercises where they have to analyze certain setbacks in their life and determine which aspects of those setbacks were caused by themselves (internal) or by the environment (external) and which aspects they have some control over and which aspects they don't have any control over.

Attribution theory: how do you look at the cause of setbacks?

|	Internal	External
Controllable		
Non-controllable		
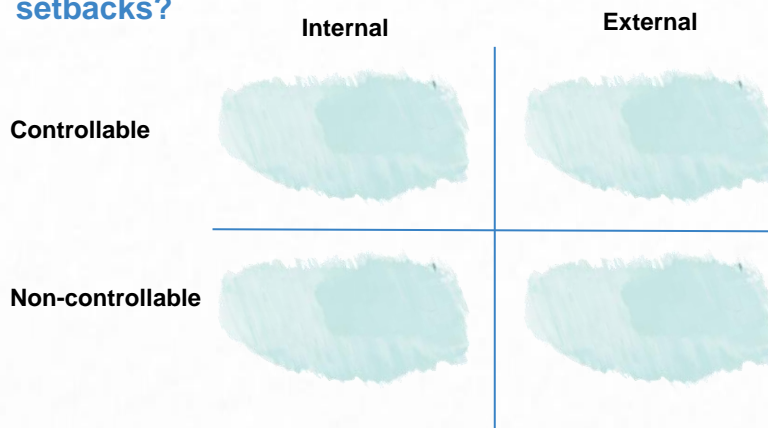
2 factors

Locus: origin of cause? Internal or external?
Controllability: is it under your control? Controllable or non-controllable?

Discussion

The present study aimed to address the gap in the existing literature by providing a broad conceptual framework for mental health challenges in the performing arts and by identifying commonalities and unique aspects across musicians, dancers and actors. The results from our data collection are in line with the existing research among professional musicians, dancers and actors, showing that they are faced with considerable mental health challenges throughout their careers, emphasizing the need for targeted prevention programs in these fields.

While the earlier research has mainly focused on the prevalence of mental health issues within individual disciplines, this research project aimed to provide a broader perspective by identifying commonalities and differences among musicians, dancers, and actors. The results show that there a large number of shared challenges between musicians, dancers and actors, including psychological challenges such as perfectionism and performance anxiety, environmental challenges such as competition and job insecurity and physical challenges such as injuries and physical exhaustion. As such, these results suggest that a prevention program that can address common issues while also accounting for discipline-specific challenges may be beneficial for performing artists. Such a prevention program can be realized by utilizing a **staged prevention concept**, employing primary, secondary and tertiary prevention layers

Prevention

Tertiary prevention

Secondary prevention

Primary prevention

Mental health challenges

Unique challenges

Shared challenges
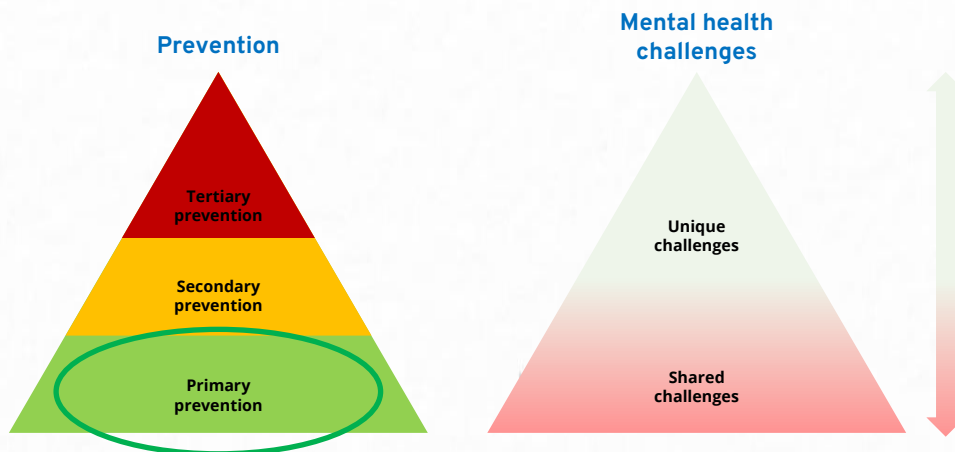
The prevention program that is described in the current research report should be regarded as a primary prevention initiative, aimed at preventing mental health issues among a broad and heterogenous group of performing artists (musicians, dancers, and actors). However, future research should also focus on developing secondary and tertiary prevention programs that are aimed at more unique mental health challenges within specific subgroups of performing artists .

Recommendations for Future Mental Health Support Initiatives

Mental health support initiatives play a vital role in protecting the mental resilience and well being of performing artists. To ensure the effectiveness of such initiatives, several key recommendations should be considered:

01 **Risk analysis & mapping of needs: know your artists!**

When setting up any type of prevention initiative, It is essential to conduct a comprehensive risk analysis in order to map the specific needs of the performing artists under investigation. Understanding the specific challenges they face enables targeted support and tailored interventions. By recognizing the diverse circumstances and potential stressors encountered performing artists, support initiatives will be better able to address unique requirements.

02 **Staged prevention (shared vs. unique challenges)**

Support initiatives should acknowledge the fact that performing artists face both shared and unique challenges. While a large number of psychological, environmental and physical challenges are shared among musicians, dancers and actors, other challenges may be specific to certain genres or career stages. By implementing a staged prevention approach, support initiatives can provide proactive support throughout different phases of an artist's career, addressing common challenges while also offering tailored support for individual needs.

03 **Interdisciplinary & participatory approach**

Support initiatives should be based upon multidisciplinary efforts: Collaboration among various disciplines and active participation from artist's themselves are crucial elements of effective support initiatives. Furthermore, engaging artists themselves in the development and implementation of initiatives ensures that the support provided aligns with their actual needs and experiences as well leads to a higher level of participation.

Recommendations for Future Mental Health Support Initiatives

04   **Inclusion: involve the whole organisation**

Development of support initiatives in artistic organizations should ideally involve the participation of the whole organization from top to bottom. That way, every voice and need can be heard and acceptance as well as participation throughout the organization is maximized. In addition, fostering a culture of inclusion throughout the entire organization will lead to a more supportive environment for artists to work in.

05   **Communication & sensibilisation**

Effective communication & sensibilization strategies are vital for raising awareness about the importance mental well-being among performing artists. As such, support initiatives should focus on sensitizing various stakeholders about the different mental health challenges faced by performing artists and the benefits of proactive support. This can involve organizing workshops, seminars, as well as awareness campaigns to encourage an open dialogue and to reduce stigma surrounding mental health topics in the organization.

06   **Patience & persistence**

Rome was not built in a day: supporting performing artist's well-being is an ongoing process that requires patience and persistence. Significant change does not happen overnight, and initiatives should be thought-out with long-term goals in mind. In any case, it is crucial to remain committed and continuously evaluate and refine ongoing support initiatives to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

Conclusion

The goal of the current study was two-fold: **1)** construct a broad conceptual framework for mental health challenges in the performing arts that is able to synthesize the existing literature on individual performing arts and to identify unique and common challenges in various performing arts disciplines. **2)** use this framework to develop a multidisciplinary prevention program aimed at preventing mental health issues among performing artists.

The results of this study show that performing artists are confronted with a plethora of mental health challenges in their studies and careers which may increase their chances of developing mental health issues. Therefore, conservatories and professional organizations within the fields of music, dance and drama should increase their focus on the mental health and well-being of their students and working professionals. One possibility to do so is by promoting psychological resilience among performing artists.

The prevention program outlined in this report is designed to strengthen the mental resilience of performing artists using three distinct prevention components:

1. Psycho-education: teaching evidence-based psychological knowledge to effectively manage challenges mental health challenges.

2. Teaching mental health challenges & coping strategies from the performing arts literature: teaching about the various psychological, environmental and physical challenges that performing artists can face in their studies and subsequent careers.

3. Practical exercises based on well-established psychological theories: practical exercises inspired by various well-established psychological theories such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, growth mindset theory and self-determination theory.

The prevention program described in the current report can be regarded as a primary prevention initiative, aimed at preventing mental health issues among a broad and heterogenous group of performing artists (musicians, dancers, and actors). However, future research projects should also consider initiatives at secondary and tertiary layers, focusing on more specific needs of certain subgroups of performing artists.

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