CultureCase

Using dance therapy to prevent falls

This research was conducted by **Trish Vella-Burrows** and **four others** at **Canterbury Christ Church University**

Summary

This paper relates the findings from an evaluation of ‘Dance to Health’: a scheme designed integrate known physiotherapy falls-prevention exercises into a creative dance programme. The programme was shown to have supported and enhanced physical, mental and social health. It was particularly effective in fostering group bonding and improved physical control and coordination. People who took part felt welcome, valued and safe, not judged, and enjoyed the connections made with other participants and the dance artists. They saw improvements in their balance, strength, flexibility, mobility and stamina – all of which are important to prevent falls.

‘Falls are a leading cause of unintentional injury and mortality in people aged 65 and over’

Dance to Health was ‘designed to develop older people’s engagement with dance whilst increasing their strength, balance, flexibility and overall wellbeing’. The use of ‘props, imagination, a range of music and creative improvisation’ distinguished it from standard fall-prevention exercises. The programme consisted of 52 dance sessions (lasting 90-minutes) delivered over six months to six participant groups across three locations in the UK.

67 participants supplied their feedback via focus group discussions and questionnaires before and after the programme

The lengthy surveys asked about dance interest and ability, group identity, loneliness and isolation, general health and mental health. They tested a handful of validated measures of wellbeing. The authors concede that a larger and more diverse sample of participants would make for a more robust statistical evidence base.

Keywords

focus group **survey** **health** **elderly** **UK** **dance**

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