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DANCE – A MEANS OF PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL IMPACT

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Abstract. Dance is a social phenomenon, organically connected with people's lives and increasingly necessary in the hectic and dynamic everyday life of the 21st century. Dance is an effective means of acquiring values and behaviors characteristic of human culture. Dancing is not just a motor action, it is an art that inspires, connects with a partner or group and transforms the performers. This is an effective practice with a high health, social and educational impact. The present study aims to measure the impact of Bulgarian folk dances with a complex specific methodology on the emotional state of different age and social groups. A systematic review, program impact on the experimental contingent, statistical processing of the measured results and the corresponding analyses were carried out. The proposed and implemented author's program is aimed at acquiring practical and applied knowledge and skills from a selected group of folk dances, with the expectation of psycho-emotional impact and recovery of the trainees. Statistically reliable experimental empirical results obtained are subjected to analysis to confirm the hypothesis of the study. The interpretations of the impact of folk dances indicated in the presentation contain confirmation of the respective contributions to health benefits in physical, psychological and emotional aspects - health through dance, for the socialization of students and for teamwork. The analysis of the methodological literature, experimental data and our own professional experience have proven the effective impact of specialized motor dance practices from folk dances, with the proposed program meeting all health status norms.

Keywords: folk dances; dance motor impact; psychological and emotional aspect

1. Introduction

Dance as a cultural code and social phenomenon is a motor practice with high social, health and educational value, which releases endorphins (hormones of happiness), reduces stress and tames negative emotions. Scientists reveal that in the context of the accelerated rhythm of life in the 21st century, it does not exist only as an entertainment activity, but is established as a functional component of wellness culture – an interdisciplinary paradigm combining physical, psycho-emotional and social well-being (Dimitrova, 2019a; Dimitrova, 2019b; Angelcheva, 2023; Popova-Dobreva, 2023). As a motor practice, dance integrates physical activity, emotional expression and aesthetic experience, becoming a unique tool for enculturation, personal development and social connectedness.

The famous American anthropologist Hanna (1987) defines dance as "movement that carries meaning", emphasizing that dancing is a universal cultural language through which human communities express their values, beliefs and social relations. Dance functions simultaneously as art, communication and social practice, carrying the potential for transformation of the individual and the group.

A number of authors have studied and proven the positive effect of dance activities (Andreev, 1975; Videnova, 2020; Ignatova & Bazelkov, 2013; Ignatova, 2017; Nesheva, 2021; Adair, 1992; Argiriadou, 2023; Liu et al., 2025; Meric & Ilhan, 2016; Quiroga Murcia et al., 2009, etc.). According to them, dance is not only a physical activity, but a cultural and social practice with a transformative impact – it inspires, unites and heals, strengthening the sense of belonging, reducing stress and supporting cognitive and motor development.

Historical and cultural data indicate that dance precedes articulated speech and represents one of the earliest forms of non-verbal communication[1]. In primitive societies, it performs a ritual function – it serves as a sacred connection with the forces of nature, for social cohesion and for the transmission of collective memory[2].

Bulgarian dance folklore is a cultural phenomenon with deep ethnic and aesthetic roots. Its structure reflects the worldview, emotionality and artistic imagination of the Bulgarian people. As Georgi Andreev (1975) notes, through dance – along with songs, costumes and customs – the temperament, values and aspirations of the nation are manifested. (Andreev, 1975:7) Folk art, according to Kiril Popov (2020), is an expression of emotional and figurative thinking, determined by specific perceptions of nature and social reality. (Popov, 2020, p. 17).

The originality of Bulgarian folk dances has impressed a number of travelers, artists and scholars who have documented the richness of this tradition (Videnova, 2020). The work of figures such as Nikolay Pavlovich, Ivan Mrkvichka, Vladimir Dimitrov – The Master, the Miladinovi brothers and Elin Pelin testifies to its deep cultural value.

Teodora Ignatova's publication (2017) emphasizes the importance of folk dances as a means of enriching educational content and developing motor culture not only among students but also among adults.

According to Irina Nesheva (2021), in the context of the Bulgarian cultural tradition, dance occupies a special place. The Bulgarian people have created a unique in its form and content system of folk dances, accompanied by music, rituals and ceremonies, which have been sustainably transmitted through generations. This intangible cultural heritage not only reflects the identity and historical destiny of the Bulgarians, but also performs an important socializing and educational function. (Nesheva, 2021, p. 62).

Folk dances and dances have a strong impact on people – both on an individual and group level. This influence is multifaceted and is manifested in:

– Emotional release and joy. The rhythm and periodic repetition of movements act as a natural anti-stress mechanism. The circle dance, characteristic of the horo, creates a sense of harmony, belonging and common energy. It allows for the spontaneous expression of emotions – joy, euphoria, peace.

– Social connectedness and belonging. The horo symbolizes collectivity – everyone moves in sync, holding hands, creating a sense of community. This reduces the feeling of isolation and loneliness and strengthens social support.

– Mental stability and balance. The repetitive steps and musical rhythm regulate the nervous system, leading to better concentration and inner balance. The dance acts as a form of "active meditation" – it focuses attention on this moment.

– Self-expression and identity. Folk dances carry the cultural memory of the clan and a sense of belonging to the tradition. Participation in them strengthens the sense of national identity and pride. In recent years, the festivals in Koprivshtitsa, Rozhen and Zheravna have become emblematic.

– Psychosomatic connection. Movement improves coordination and the connection between the body and the psyche. Releasing energy through dance reduces tension and improves vitality.

According to the authors Julieta Videnova and Desislava Vankova (2019), Bulgarian folk dances are not only a heritage, but also a means of developing communication skills and building community, recommended by the WHO as a form of physical activity for the prevention of chronic diseases. (Videnova, Vankova, 2019, p. 50).

Purpose and tasks

The purpose of this study is to study the effect of Bulgarian folk dances as a means of influencing the psycho-emotional state of representatives of different age and social groups.

In accordance with the set goal, the following tasks are formulated:

1. To clarify the theoretical foundations of the problem, relevant to the purpose of the study.

2. To trace the dynamics of the impact of folk dances on the emotional state of the research subjects.

3. To summarize the results and formulate conclusions with practical applicability.

The subject of the study is the technology for targeted impact through engagement with Bulgarian folk dances on the psycho-emotional state of the subjects studied.

The object of the study is integrative indicators reflecting the main components of the psycho-emotional sphere of the participants.

The study contingent is 58 women aged between 18 and 60 years, included in one experimental group. The social status of the sample is heterogeneous and is focused on the fields of education, healthcare, economics, marketing and services.

2. Methodology

Methods

The research was carried out using a complex methodology, including: theoretical analysis and synthesis, sociological and test methods, as well as a mathematical and statistical approach through variation analysis.

The studies cover the period 2023 – 2024, with practical classes being held according to a program twice a week, lasting 60 minutes. The experimental program includes the performance of Bulgarian folk dances from different ethnographic regions of Bulgaria: Pravo horo, Daychovo, Elenino, Gankino, Shirto, Chichovo, Graovsko, Maleshevsko horo, Dzhanguritsa, etc.

The impact assessment is based on the following indicators:

– SAM test (The test consists of 30 pairs of opposite states of self-esteem, activity and mood. The person being tested self-assesses on a scale. The ratings of each state are summed up and the current emotional state is determined);

– STAI-Y1 (Situational anxiety. The questionnaire measures anxiety both as a personality trait and as an emotional state. It consists of 20 questions-statements that, according to instructions, assess how the subject feels at the moment);

– STAI-Y2 (Personal anxiety. The questionnaire contains 20 statements that assess how the subject feels in general. It is used for diagnosing neuroticism, professional selection, etc.) (after Ivan Ivanov, 1999).

3. Results

Table 1 presents the statistically obtained data characterizing the emotional state of those engaged in folk dances. The numerator shows the values before, and the denominator shows the values at the end of the experiment. By analyzing the average values and the variability of the studied indicators, the degree of impact of the applied practice was studied.

Self-esteem, as an emotional state of an individual, is determined by the degree of self-esteem, behind which one of the most key factors for mental health actually lies. In many cases, self-esteem is influenced by age, life experience, social status, genes, physical health. The average age of the studied individuals is 44.3 years. The youngest of them is 18 years old, and the oldest is 60. 16.6% of the participants are under the age of 30. The relatively low percentage confirms the finding made by other studies that young people do not have established lasting habits for physical activity by the age of 30. On the other hand, Bulgarian folk dance and music classes are becoming increasingly popular. Horoteki are appearing in large numbers in populated areas, where visitors can practice this type of activity for the purpose of emotional satisfaction. The self-esteem of the subjects was positively affected and increased by 4.6% at the end of the experiment. In this context, the effect of folk dances is particularly valuable.

Table 1. Statistical profile of participants in folk dance classes

№	Indicators	n	Av	S_{Av}	R	V%	% growth	t	Pt%
1	Self esteem	58	30,5	2,5	9	8,1	4,6	-5,5	99,9
			31,9	2,7	8	8,3			
2	Activity	58	30,1	3,2	11	10,6	5,3	-5,1	99,9
			31,7	3,1	11	9,9			
3	Mood	58	32,3	2,3	7	6,6	13	-6,2	99,9
			36,5	2,4	8	7,5			
4	STAI-Y1	58	32,5	6,3	22	19,3	4,3	2,3	96,8
			31,1	6,8	22	21,7			
5	STAI-Y2	58	34,9	6,7	23	19,2	4,2	2,6	98,3
			33,4	7,3	25	21,9			

Activity, more specifically physical activity, includes any action that is performed using the musculoskeletal system. Looking at the context in which it is performed, it can be

defined as activity – during work (professional), during free time (for entertainment), at home (housework) or to overcome a given distance (transport). It is a well-known fact that the lack of physical activity is a prerequisite for the development of a number of diseases such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, poor blood circulation, etc. In the studied group, this indicator recorded higher values at the end of the experiment (30.1 – 31.7). Movements in folk dances often have a fast pace, which raises the pulse to levels comparable to cardio training, complex steps develop fine motor skills, spatial orientation and support coordination. The coefficient of variation decreases, which indicates homogeneity of the group. The high guarantee probability (Pt 99.9%) imposes the assumption that the changes obtained are a result of the applied program.

Mood is an emotional state that corresponds to mental processes (sensation, memory, thinking), perceptions of the surrounding reality and behavioral reactions, including the way speech communication occurs. Moods are largely influenced by mentality, way of thinking, attitudes towards experience and expectations. Also, physical condition (fatigue, discomfort, pain, etc.) leads to positive or negative moods, to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the activities that are carried out, with the way daily formal and informal contacts occur. The mood of the participants in the study also improves. At the beginning, the average value is 32.3, and at the end – 36.5, with an increase of 13%. This is due to the musical accompaniment and the character of the choir, which carry a strong emotional charge. External manifestations – laughter, shouts, songs – further enhance the positive effect.

Anxiety is a personality trait that is characterized by a person's tendency to be tense. In situational anxiety, the condition is specifically caused by a situation that causes anxiety.

Examining the change in situational anxiety in the subjects studied, we notice that it changes in a positive direction (decreases) under the influence of the applied methodology. At the beginning of the experiment, the subjects studied in the group showed a degree of anxiety within the limits – AV1=32.7. At the end, the data were again taken and the values were respectively lower AV2=31.1, with a norm AV<45.5. In the experimental group, a decrease in anxiety was observed and the participants fell into the non-anxious category. The coefficient of variation increased from 19.3% to 21.7%. The guarantee probability Pt =96.8% confirms that the positive changes that occurred are a result of the applied program.

Personal anxiety is characterized by the perception of stressors as dangerous and the individual often reacts uncontrollably. The average value of the studied characteristic decreased by 1.5 points at the end of the experiment. The coefficient of variation increased slightly. We can conclude that the applied methodology positively affects personal anxiety, although to varying degrees. Dancing is a form of aerobic activity and increases heart rate, releases endorphins (happiness hormones), while at the same time lowering cortisol levels (stress hormone). Bulgarian folk dances create a sense of connection and belonging. This reduces the feeling of isolation, which often increases anxiety. Holding hands and being in sync with others has a calming effect.

4. Discussion

The results of the study show that Bulgarian folk dances have a clear psycho-emotional impact on users – they reduce anxiety, improve mood and enhance the feeling of emotional

balance. This can be expressed in a combination of physical activity, musical impact and social interaction, which together create conditions for releasing tension and increasing overall well-being. The data obtained are in line with other studies in the field of dance practices and dance therapy, which also emphasize the role of dance as a means of psychological support.

However, the study has limitations related to the sample size and the short-term nature of the observation. In the future, it would be useful to track the long-term effects of systematic participation in dance practices with Bulgarian folk dances and to compare different dance styles.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the methodological literature and the results of the experiment show a positive impact of specialized dance practice on self-esteem, activity and mood. Classes with Bulgarian folk dances have an anti-stress effect on the subjects studied. The combination of physical activity, social connection, and cultural experience leads to joy, calm, and a sense of meaning and belonging. In conclusion, it can be said that dance is an accessible and effective means of psycho-emotional impact, which has significant potential in both therapeutic and educational environments.

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NOTES

1. https://zala1.com/istoriya-na-tanca/
2. https://krimagnanartanci.alle.bg/

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