

Behind the Scenes: The Role of Tiredness in Psychological Flexibility Training in an Adolescent Ballerina

A DNA-V case study on physical tiredness and psychological flexibility in elite youth ballet

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Introduction

- Adolescent ballerinas seeking professional careers face intense training demands alongside daily life
- These demands highlight the need for psychological support that is sensitive to the athlete's specific context
- This case examines the psychological flexibility processes during a DNA-V intervention with a semi-professional ballerina

Methodology

- Single-case study, observational design
- 13-year-old Brazilian ballerina in professional training
- Eight weekly online sessions, 30 minutes each
- DNA-V model of psychological flexibility
- Clinical observational analysis across sessions
- Pre- and post-intervention semi-structured interviews based on the Psychological Flexibility in Sport Scale
- Weekly post-training questionnaires based on Subjective Vitality Scales (SVS)

Results

- In-sessions observations indicated that the intervention promoted psychological flexibility processes
- However, recovery state emerged as a key contextual variable
- A recurring pattern emerged: the athlete's level of physical tiredness appeared to shape how she engaged with the work

Psychological flexibility was more observable when the athlete was physically rested

Marked tiredness was associated with disengagement and automatic responding

Indicator	When Rested	When Tired
Participation	Active engagement with exercises	Disengagement; brief, automatic answers
Response style	Present-focused, elaborated responses	Automatic, surface-level responding
Emotional awareness	Noticed and described internal experiences	Reduced awareness of emotions and sensations
Describing experiences	Clear description of situations and contingencies	Difficulty describing experiences clearly
Recall	Good recall of previously discussed concepts	Difficulty recalling previously discussed concepts
Overall flexibility	Flexible engagement with DNA-V exercises	Rigid, automatic responding (inflexibility)

Discussion

- DNA-V may be a promising framework for context-sensitive psychological work with adolescent dancers
- Psychological flexibility processes may fluctuate according to recovery state and training load
- Future research: include objective fatigue measures and larger samples for more idiomonic research in depth

Some questions

- How should psychotherapists adapt the exercises when the athlete arrives visibly tired?
- How can clinicians distinguish tiredness-driven disengagement from low motivation or rapport difficulties?
- How might session scheduling be coordinated with training calendars to better support psychological flexibility training?

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