

Executive Summary

“We protect animals well”

A structural approach to abusive conduct within circus schools.

Research question. This study examines abusive conduct (a term encompassing different forms of harassment and discrimination) within artistic school milieus and more precisely professional circus schools. Focus is on the management level of schools, and the study investigates knowledge about abusive conduct and prevention against it.

Methods & Materials. The study employed an anonymous questionnaire directed to representatives of schools that are members of FEDEC, Fédération Européenne des Ecoles de Cirque professionnelles. The answers were treated and analyzed with a thematic analysis.

Results. Analysis of the collected material was made through a theoretical lens that takes into consideration a structural approach as well as research of harassment within other fields, such as sports and academia. Results confirm a considerable presence of cultures of abuse within a majority of schools. Further, results show that knowledge on prevention differs considerably from one school to another. This ranges from carefully developed prevention to active protection of abusers.

Lessons learned. The study's results put forward that managers need to make greater efforts in achieving knowledge of preventive measures against abusive conduct. The author encourages managers to aim for transparency and openness on the topic. Further, the study underlines the importance of better knowledge regarding the role of bystander in these institutions. The idea that sexual harassment is a personal issue between two individuals, rather than the result of co-dependent surroundings, remains a fundamental problem. If these bystanders achieve tools to analyze and act, an important step in order to stop normalization of destructive cultures can be made. Reflecting relevant statistics, the study also points out that equality must be better accounted for, as women are being considerably underrepresented in teaching and management posts. Such skewed representation is shown to have a negative impact on the teaching and learning environment. Finally, it must be noted that the research within this specific field is almost nonexistent. As such, Circus, as well as other artistic disciplines, are in great need of more research in order to make art schools safer places for practitioners and, as a result, the artists of tomorrow.