

# *A Profile of Professional Dancers in Canada*

*Based on a questionnaire from the  
Dancer Transition Resource Centre*

[www.dtrc.ca](http://www.dtrc.ca)

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<http://www.hillstrategies.com>

## **Background and statistical reliability**

Throughout the fall of 2004, the Dancer Transition Resource Centre (DTRC) distributed a questionnaire to dancers across Canada which included questions concerning the demographic and family characteristics of professional dancers, their dance work in 2003/04, their education and earnings, as well as their expected age of retirement from their performing careers.

The DTRC worked to ensure that a large number of questionnaires were completed, by contacting DTRC members and other dancers who might qualify for and benefit from DTRC membership. Email, mail and phone requests were sent to all members (approximately 420). DTRC, through its national and regional offices, contacted independent and company-based members across Canada to set up meetings to personally administer the paper questionnaire.

Dancers from across Canada who were not DTRC members were sent a paper questionnaire via DTRC representatives, member organizations and other sources. The DTRC also contacted many companies and individuals active in culturally diverse dance through a list provided by the Canada Council for the Arts. Although some of these dancers replied to the survey, a significant number of dancers in culturally diverse companies already have other full-time professions and would be less disposed to completing a questionnaire by a dancer transition organization. Joysanne Sidimus, DTRC Executive Director, has met with many culturally-diverse dance companies in the past, at which time it was agreed that many company members would not benefit from the career transition services of the DTRC.

The efforts by the DTRC resulted in 543 responses in total, including 220 members, 296 non-members and 27 DTRC Stream I grant recipients.

This document summarizes the responses of 489 active dance professionals. The 489 active dance professionals include 220 members of the DTRC and 269 non-members who indicated that they consider themselves to be professional dancers. Stream I grant recipients are no longer active dancers, and their responses are therefore excluded from this profile. A small number of the 489 dance professionals would be active only as choreographers and not as performers.

Although the exact number of professional dancers in Canada is not known, a reasonable estimate is provided by the 2001 Census. Data from the 2001 Census shows that there are 1,275 dancers in "Performing Arts, Spectator Sports and Related Industries". It should be noted that the Census captures those who worked more at their dance activities than at any other occupation in May of 2001.

The 489 professional dancers in this report provide a statistically representative estimate of the 1,275 performing dancers in Canada. More specifically, the sample will provide an estimate that is within 4.6 percentage points 99 times out of 100 (a very high statistical standard).

In terms of response rates, about one-half of members responded to the survey ( $220/420 = 52\%$ ). The exact number of non-member dancers who were sent the questionnaire is not known. However, using the census estimate of 1,275 dancers, there would be about 855 non-member dancers in Canada (i.e., 1,275 total minus 420 members). Of these, 269 professional dancers completed the survey, for an implied response rate of 31%. The actual response rate for non-members is estimated to be somewhat higher than this, possibly 40% or so. These response rates are commendable for a relatively long and detailed paper questionnaire.

Feedback to the questionnaire was overwhelmingly positive, with 94% of respondents indicating that the “questions were thoughtful and well-designed” or that the “questionnaire helped get them thinking about the DTRC and transition issues” (or both). The other 6% of respondents indicated that “the questionnaire was too long” or that “questions were poorly asked or difficult to understand”. This positive response indicates a high level of interest in the issue of dancer transitions and is another indication of the appropriateness of this questionnaire for professional dancers in Canada.

Staff at Hill Strategies Research entered all of the questionnaires into a custom-designed Access database. Hill Strategies Research checked 20% of all the questionnaires entered to ensure data entry accuracy. Based on the statistical significance of the survey, as well as the high quality of data entry, the statistics in this report should be considered a reliable and accurate profile of professional dancers in Canada.

Hill Strategies Research analyzed the questionnaire results to identify important characteristics of professional dancers in Canada. This report summarizes the demographic and family characteristics of professional dancers, their dance work in 2003/04, their education and earnings, as well as their expected age of retirement from their performing careers.

### **Geographic, demographic and family characteristics of professional dancers**

The following table provides a breakdown by province of the professional dancers responding to the DTRC questionnaire. Overall, it appears that the provinces are appropriately represented by the DTRC data based on the size of their dance communities. The phrasing of the question was: “In which provinces or territories did you dance between September 2003 and August 2004, excluding touring and residencies? That is, what home base(s) did you have for your dance work between September 2003 and August 2004?”

Location	Number	Percent
British Columbia	70	14%
Alberta	46	9%
Saskatchewan	8	2%
Manitoba	38	8%
Ontario	161	33%
Quebec	184	38%
New Brunswick	7	1%
Prince Edward Island	4	1%
Nova Scotia	12	2%
Newfoundland and Labrador	4	1%
Yukon	1	0%
Northwest Territories	0	0%
Nunavut	1	0%
Outside Canada	48	10%
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>100%</b>

Three-quarters of the respondents completed an English-language questionnaire, with the other one-quarter completing a French-language questionnaire (369 English, 120 French).

Professional dance is a field of endeavour where women are in a strong majority: 71% of professional dancers responding to the DTRC questionnaire are female.

The average age of professional dancers in Canada is 31, and the median age is 29. Of the questionnaire respondents:

- 2% are 18 or 19 years old;
- 51% are in their twenties;
- 35% are in their thirties;
- 9% are in their forties; and
- 3% are 50 or over.

Three-quarters of the professional dancers were born in Canada, while the other one-quarter were born outside of the country.

Only 10% of professional dancers in Canada have children. Of those who are 30 or older, only 20% have children. One in six female dancers has a child, and the fertility rate is 0.18 children per woman. In comparison, the overall fertility rate in Canada is 1.5 children per woman.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada census data as reported in *The Daily*, December 22, 2003. See <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/031222/d031222c.htm>.

## Dance work in 2003/04

The following table shows that a majority of questionnaire respondents perform modern/contemporary dance as their primary dance form. Ballet is the primary dance form of another one-quarter of the professional dancers responding to the questionnaire.

Primary dance form	% of professional dancers
Modern/contemporary	62%
Ballet	26%
Other	4%
Jazz	3%
Culture-specific	3%
Musical theatre	3%

A slight majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they were primarily self-employed in 2003/04. Another 41% of respondents indicated that their primary employment status was employed. A small group of respondents (4%) had no primary employment status.

About one-third of all professional dancers were both employed *and* self-employed in their dance work in 2003/04. In particular:

- nearly one-half of those who were primarily employed also took on at least one self-employed engagement in 2003/04; and
- about one-quarter of those who were primarily self-employed also took on at least one employed position in 2003/04.

Due to the changing ecology of the dance world, the questionnaire used the term 'engager' to refer to anyone who hired dancers, including dance companies, independent choreographers, collectives, etc.

Respondents were asked about their *primary* dance working environment between September 2003 and August 2004. The largest percentage of respondents worked with several dance engagers (43%). A similar percentage worked 26 weeks or more with one engager only (39%), while a smaller group of respondents worked 25 or fewer weeks with one engager only (17%).

On average, each of the professional dancers worked with 2.8 dance engagers between September 2003 and August 2004. The distribution of responses regarding the number of dance engagers is as follows:

- 28% of professional dancers worked with one engager only;
- 18% worked with two engagers;
- 23% worked with three engagers;
- 12% worked with four engagers;
- 7% worked with five engagers; and
- 11% worked with more than five engagers.

From the responses to these two questions, it appears that many dancers who *primarily* worked with just one engager also performed with other dance engagers: 56% of professional dancers indicated that their *primary* dance working environment was with one engager (either 25 weeks or less or 26 weeks or more), while only 28% of all dancers worked only with one engager during the whole year covered by the questionnaire.

Questionnaire respondents were asked approximately how many dance performances they did between September 2003 and August 2004. Of those responding:

- 16% did 1 to 5 performances;
- 10% did 6 to 10 performances;
- 20% did 11 to 20 performances;
- 31% did 21 to 50 performances;
- 23% did 51 or more performances.

The midpoint of these ranges can be used to estimate an average. On this basis, professional dancers performed in an average of about 30 performances during the survey year.

On average, professional dancers spent at least 12 hours in performance and/or rehearsals (excluding class) in approximately 26 weeks between September 2003 and August 2004. On average, they were paid for 24 of these 26 weeks.

The questionnaire respondents were asked about their membership in performer organizations. The most common responses were the Regroupement québécois de la danse and Canadian Actors' Equity (both selected by 20% of respondents), followed by Union des artistes (15%) and ACTRA (12%). The following table shows all memberships reported by the questionnaire respondents.

<b>Memberships</b>	<b>%</b>
Regroupement québécois de la danse	20%
Canadian Actors' Equity	20%
Union des artistes	15%
ACTRA	12%
Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists – Ontario	7%
Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists – BC	6%
Other	6%
Dance Ontario	4%
Dance Centre	4%
Dance Umbrella of Ontario	2%
Canadian Dance Assembly	1%
Alberta Dance Alliance	1%
Dance Saskatchewan	1%
Dance Manitoba	1%
Union of B.C. Performers	1%

## Education

The following table shows that dancers have high levels of education in their field. One-third of dancers have a dance-related undergraduate or post-graduate university education, higher than the 22% of the working population of Canada that has obtained university credentials.<sup>2</sup>

Another one-fifth of professional dancers have a college education, similar to the 18% of all working Canadians with a college education (see *A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada*, Hill Strategies Research Inc., September 2004).

A large proportion of dancers – 61% - attended a professional dance school. A significant percentage (43%) also attended a private dance school. (Because dancers could choose all applicable responses, the percentages in this table add up to more than 100%.)

Dance education	%
Post-graduate university	6%
Undergraduate university	27%
College (CEGEP, technical or community)	19%
Professional dance school (National Ballet School, Toronto Dance Theatre, Royal Winnipeg Ballet, etc.)	61%
Performing arts high school	12%
Non performing arts high school	9%
Private dance school	43%

Dancers were also asked about non-academic dance-related education that they have received. The following table shows that a large majority of professional dancers have taken summer (or other) intensive sessions, workshops and master classes. A significant proportion (43%) has received apprenticeship opportunities. (Because dancers could choose all applicable responses, the percentages in this table add up to more than 100%.)

Other dance-related education	%
Master classes	80%
Workshops	84%
Summer (or other) intensives	87%
Apprenticeships	43%
Other	13%

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<sup>2</sup> See *A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada Based on the 2001 Census*, September 2004, available at <http://www.hillstrategies.com>.

On average, the professional dancers responding to the questionnaire had eight years of dance education before their first professional dance performance. The following table shows the distribution of respondents regarding their years of education before their first professional dance performance.

<b>Years of education before dancing professionally</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 5	27%
5 to 9	31%
10 to 14	31%
15 or more	12%

Professional dancers were also asked about their overall level of education, whether dance-related or not. The following table shows that the responses to this question reveal even higher levels of education than in response to the question regarding dance-related education.

<b>Overall education</b>	<b>%</b>
Post-graduate university	10%
Undergraduate university	27%
Some university (i.e., in progress or incomplete)	14%
College (CEGEP, technical or community)	16%
Some CEGEP, technical or community college (i.e., in progress or incomplete)	4%
Completed high school	26%
Less than high school diploma	2%

On average, the professional dancers responding to the questionnaire have danced professionally for nine years. The following table shows the distribution of respondents regarding their years of professional dance experience.

<b>Years danced professionally</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 5	34%
5 to 9	28%
10 to 14	19%
15 to 19	9%
20 or more	9%

## Earnings

Professional dancers were asked about the dance-related activities from which they earned income during the past tax year (generally the 2003 calendar year). Almost all selected performing (92%). The next most common sources of dance earnings were teaching (51%), choreography (31%) and grants (22%). The following table summarizes the responses to this question. (Because dancers could choose all applicable responses, the percentages in this table add up to more than 100%.)

Sources of dance earnings	%
Performing	92%
Choreography	31%
Artistic direction	11%
Rehearsal direction	16%
Grants	22%
Teaching	51%
Writing about dance	4%
Administration / management (dance-related)	11%
Dance notation	0%
Other	11%

On average, professional dancers earned approximately \$18,000 from these dance-related sources in the past tax year. The estimated *median* earnings from these dance-related sources are lower (just over \$11,000).

The median is a measure of the earnings of a “typical” dancer. Half of the dancers have earnings that are less than the median value, while the other half has earnings greater than the median. The median is less influenced than the average (more appropriately known as the “mean”) by extreme observations (i.e., a few individuals reporting very large earnings). As a consequence, median earnings are often lower than average earnings.

The following table shows that about one-quarter of all professional dancers earn \$7,500 or less and a similar proportion earn between \$7,501 and \$15,000. Fifty-one percent of all dancers earn \$15,000 or less.

Dance earnings	%
\$7,500 or less	27%
\$7,501 to \$15,000	24%
\$15,001 to \$22,500	17%
\$22,501 to \$30,000	17%
\$30,001 to \$45,000	9%
\$45,001 to \$60,000	3%
\$60,001 to \$75,000	2%
Over \$75,000	1%

The professional dancers were also asked about their gross earnings from all sources in the previous tax year. On average, professional dancers earned approximately \$22,000 from all sources. The estimated *median* earnings from all sources are somewhat lower (just under \$19,000).

In comparison, average earnings in the overall Canadian labour force are about \$32,000.<sup>3</sup> Professional dancers' overall average earnings are 31% less than this figure.

The following table shows the percentage of professional dancers in various ranges of overall earnings. In comparison with the previous table, the following table shows that fewer dancers earn \$7,500 or less overall. Not surprisingly, dancers earning this little from their dance activities frequently have other occupations. Similar to the table above, about one-quarter of all professional dancers earn between \$7,501 and \$15,000.

Overall earnings	%
\$7,500 or less	12%
\$7,501 to \$15,000	26%
\$15,001 to \$22,500	20%
\$22,501 to \$30,000	21%
\$30,001 to \$45,000	12%
\$45,001 to \$60,000	5%
\$60,001 to \$75,000	2%
Over \$75,000	1%

Dancers were asked what other sources of income they have. Nearly one-half of respondents had income from non-dance related employment or self-employment. The next largest percentage (28%) had no other sources of income, while 18% received employment insurance during their previous tax year.

Other income sources	%
Non-dance related employment or self-employment	47%
Employment insurance	18%
Workers' compensation or other work-related plans	4%
Private health income plans	0%
Other government support (including social assistance, etc.)	2%
DTRC assistance	2%
Other	7%
No other sources	28%

<sup>3</sup> Based on 2001 census data reported in *A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada Based on the 2001 Census*, Hill Strategies Research Inc., September 2004, available at <http://www.hillstrategies.com>.

Given their low overall earnings, dancers were also asked whether they received financial support from any other sources (not included in their overall income) in the previous tax year. The largest percentage (39%) received no other support, while 30% received financial support from relatives or friends. Similar percentages of professional dancers received financial support from a spouse or partner (18%) or from personal savings or investments (15%).

<b>Other financial support</b>	<b>%</b>
Spouse / partner	18%
Relatives or friends	30%
Personal savings or investments	15%
Student loan	3%
Other loan (excluding mortgage)	4%
DTRC programs	3%
Other	3%
No other sources	39%

## Key findings

Based on the responses of 489 active dance professionals to a DTRC questionnaire in the fall of 2004, this report has found that:

- Professional dance is a field of endeavour where women are in a strong majority: 71% of professional dancers responding to the DTRC questionnaire are female.
- The average age of professional dancers in Canada is 31, and the median age is 29.
- Only 10% of professional dancers in Canada have children. One in six female dancers has a child, and the fertility rate is 0.18 children per woman. In comparison, the overall fertility rate in Canada is 1.5 children per woman.
- A majority of questionnaire respondents perform modern/contemporary dance as their primary dance form. Ballet is the primary dance form of another one-quarter of the professional dancers responding to the questionnaire.
- A slight majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they were *primarily* self-employed in 2003/04.
- About one-third of all professional dancers were both employed *and* self-employed in their dance work in 2003/04.
- On average, each of the professional dancers worked with 2.8 dance engagers between September 2003 and August 2004.
- Professional dancers performed in an average of about 30 performances during the survey year.
- Professional dancers are highly educated. One-third of them have a dance-related undergraduate or post-graduate university education. In comparison, 22% of the working population of Canada has obtained university credentials.
- A large proportion of dancers – 61% - attended a professional dance school.
- Many dancers have undertaken a variety of other dance education opportunities, including summer intensive sessions, workshops, master classes and apprenticeship opportunities.
- On average, the professional dancers responding to the questionnaire had eight years of dance education before their first professional dance performance.
- On average, the professional dancers responding to the questionnaire have danced professionally for nine years.
- Professional dancers have very low earnings. Fifty-one percent of professional dancers earn \$15,000 or less from dance-related sources. On average, dancers earn approximately \$18,000 from dance-related sources.

- Nearly one-half of professional dancers have income from non-dance related employment or self-employment.
- Even when non-dance sources of income are included in average earnings, the earnings of dancers are still very low. Professional dancers earn an average of approximately \$22,000 from all sources. In comparison, average earnings in the overall Canadian labour force are about \$32,000. Professional dancers' average earnings from all sources are 31% less than this figure.
- A typical professional dancer earns just under \$19,000 from dance and non-dance sources.
- Almost one-third of dancers receive financial support from relatives or friends.