

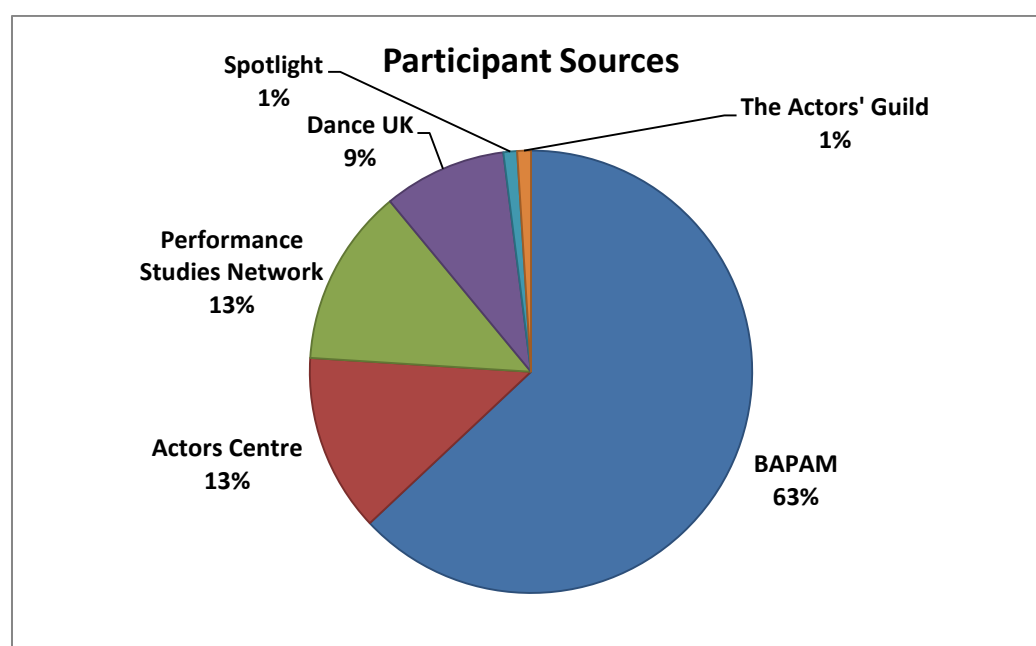
Results of the Study

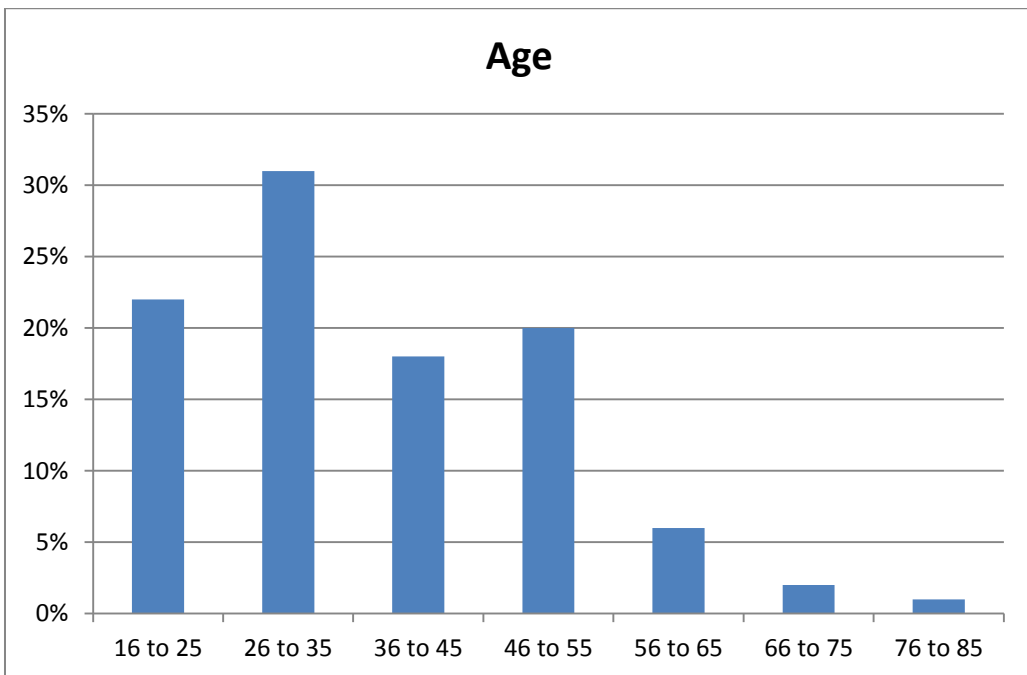
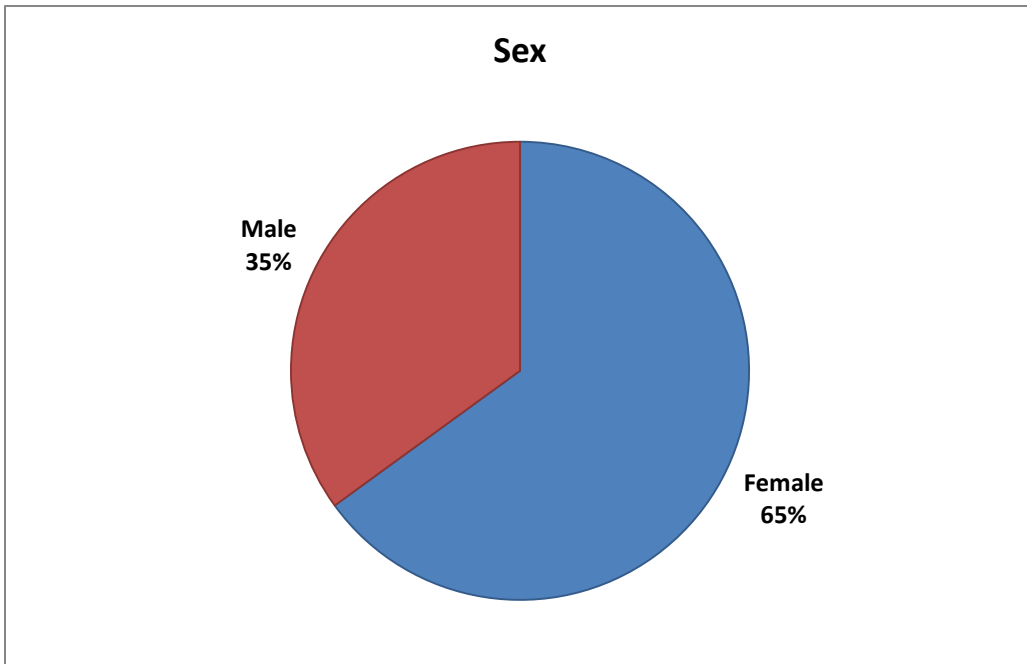
“Stage Fright, Well-being and Recovery in Performing Artists”

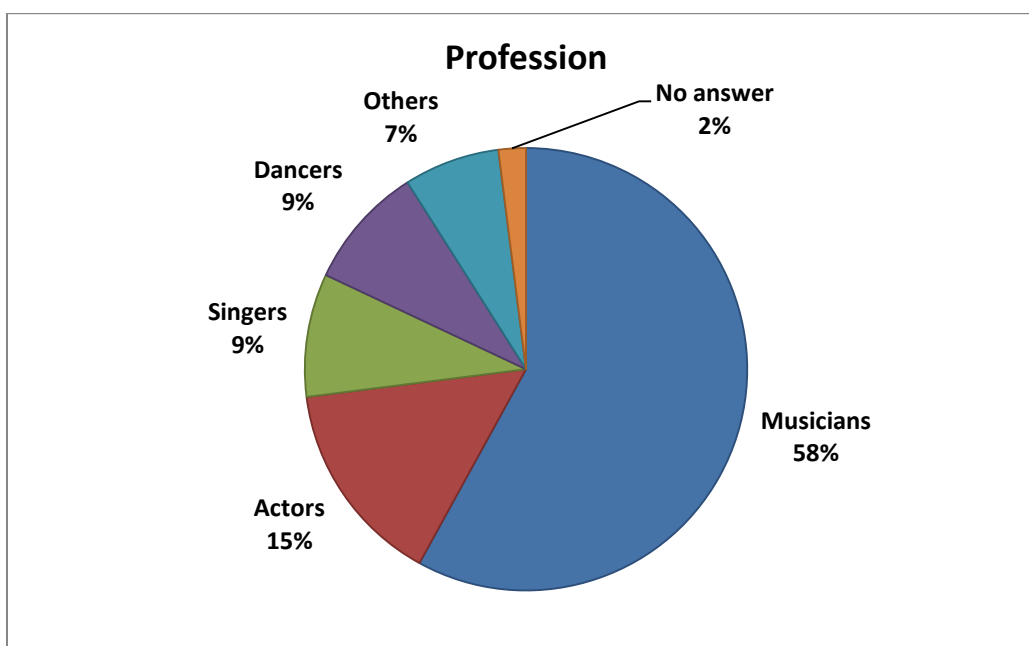
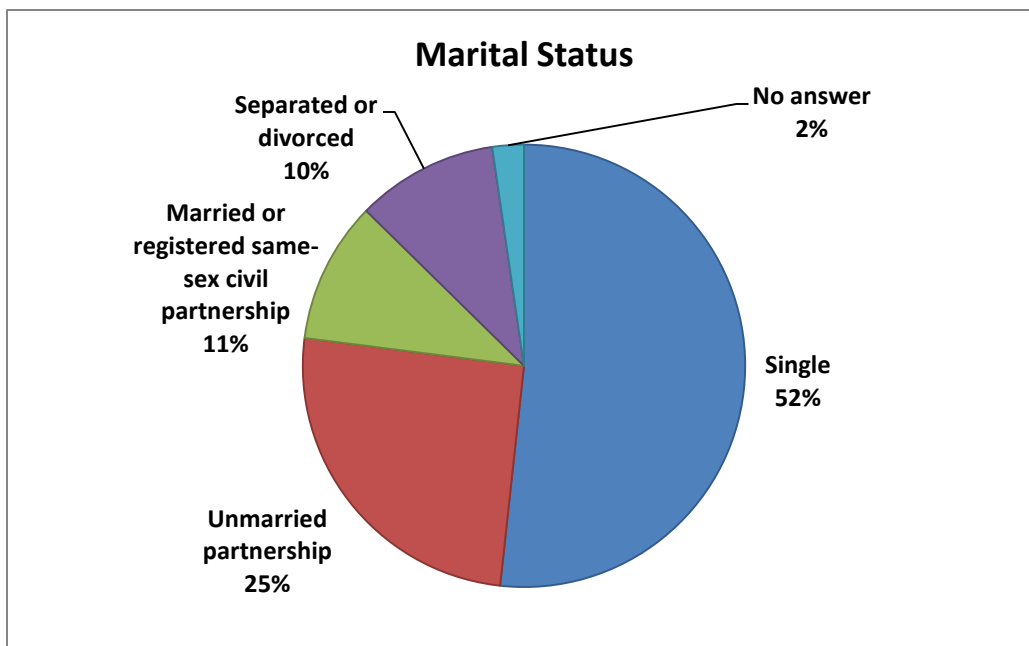
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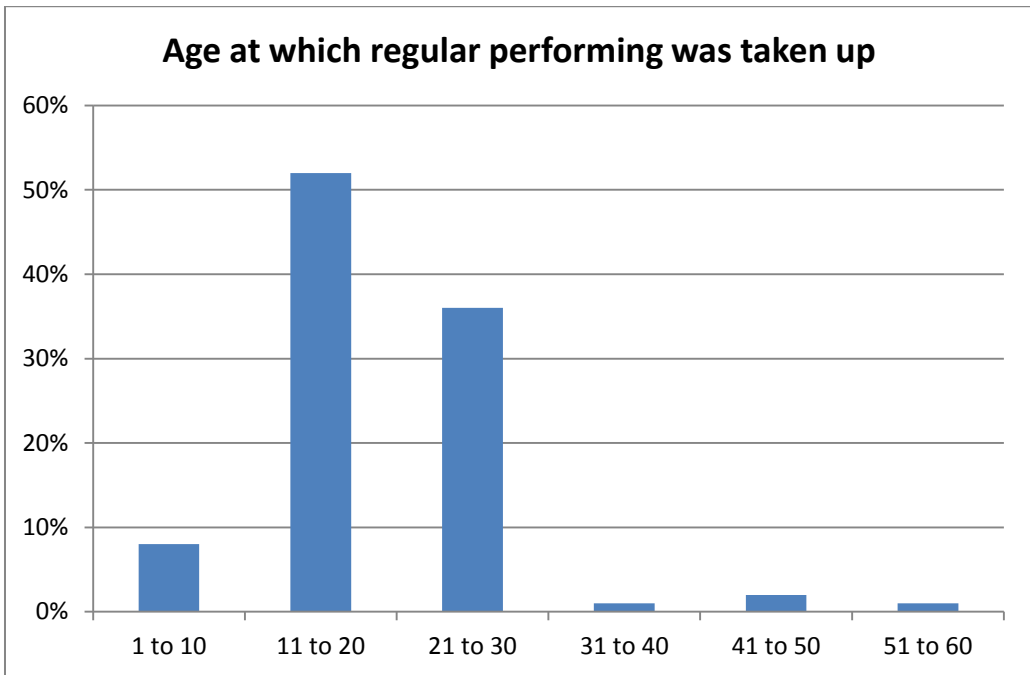
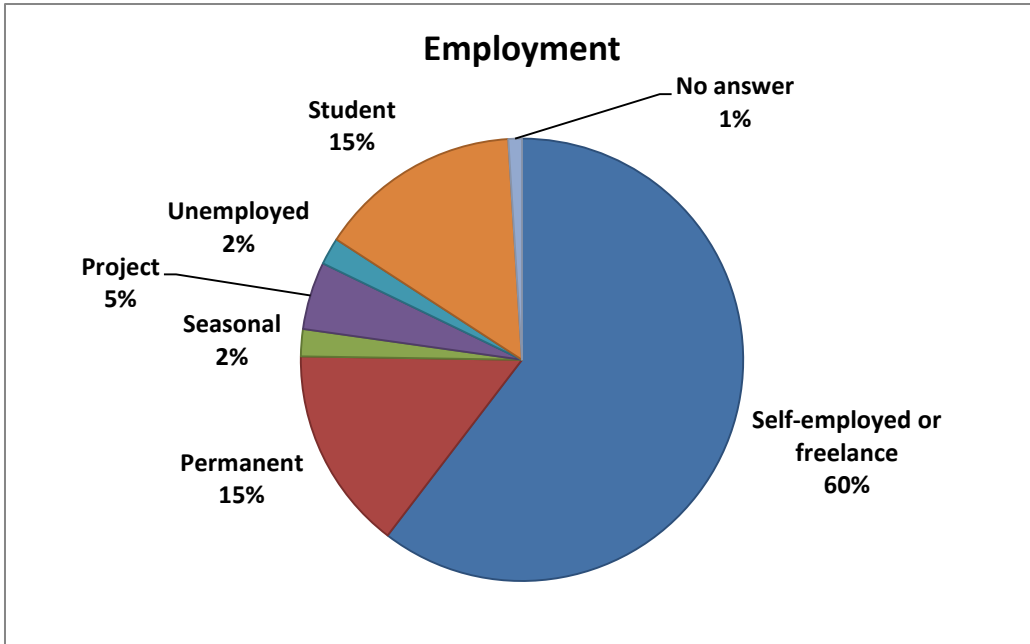
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Demographics









Part 1: Stage Fright, Health & Well-being, and Recovery

Constructs

Psychological research on **stage fright**¹ is still in its infancy and there are still many different models of performance anxiety in the literature. Nevertheless, the classic ‘three-system-model of fear’ seems the most popular. According to that, stage fright consists of three components: physiological reactions (e.g. rapid heartbeat, trembling), thoughts (e.g. thinking that the worst will happen or that others will not approve) and behaviour (avoiding or approaching performances). You might have noticed in the questionnaire that the questions regarding the intensity of stage fright referred to physiologic reactions and to thoughts. However, I did not investigate the behaviour component.

An indicator of **health** was obtained by measuring depressive and somatic symptoms, chronic fatigue and sleep problems; an indicator of **well-being** by measuring job and life satisfaction and positive and negative feelings.

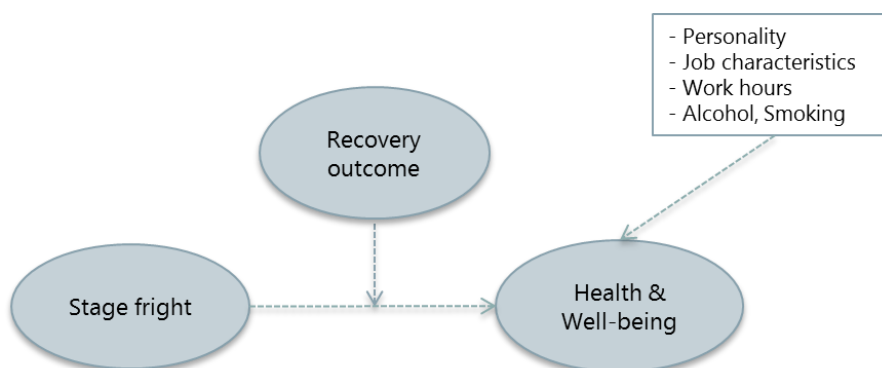
When defining recovery the process of recovery taking place during a (leisure) activity and recovery as the outcome of this process need to be differentiated. The process of recovery will be defined in the second part. For both parts of this study the daily **recovery outcome** was defined as having been successful when a person who had felt tired from one working period felt refreshed by the start of the next one.

Additional data: Job characteristics, personality and several other data were collected as it was expected that these constructs might also be related to indicators of health & well-being. **Job characteristics** included measures of ‘effort-reward-imbalance’, that is whether the effort (e.g. due to time pressure) was larger than the reward (e.g. job promotion or security), as well as measures of job ambivalence, that is the extent to which a person simultaneously likes and dislikes his or her job. For **personality characteristics** data on extraversion, emotional stability (i.e. an individual’s tendency to show good emotional adjustment to stressful events), openness to experience (i.e. an individual’s tendency to show creativity and willingness to take risks), conscientiousness and ‘overcommitment’ (i.e. excessive work-related commitment) were measured. Furthermore, working hours, drinking and smoking habits were expected to be related to health & well-being.

Assumptions

- 1) The more intensely participants experienced stage fright (thoughts *and* physiologic reactions) in the past 3 to 6 months, the more signs of impaired health & well-being they showed.
- 2) The more intensely participants experienced physiologic stage fright reactions and the *less* they tended to recover successfully between daily working periods, the more signs of impaired health & well-being they showed compared to participants who also experienced more intense physiologic stage fright reactions but *did* tend to recover successfully between working periods.

¹ I use the terms “stage fright” and “performance anxiety” as synonyms.

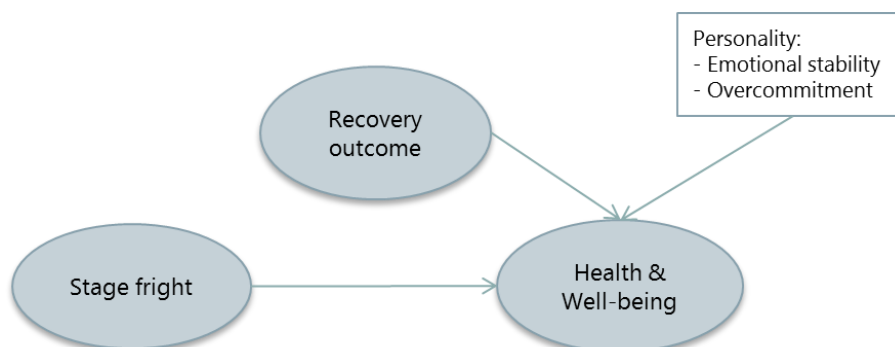


Results

1) The more intensely participants experienced stage fright (thoughts *and* physiologic reactions) in the past 3 to 6 months the more signs of impaired health & well-being they showed.

2) Recovery outcome did not have the predicted effect on the relationship between physiologic stage fright reactions and health & well-being, it did have, however, a direct effect on health & well-being: The more successfully participants recovered between daily working periods, the more signs of good health & well-being they tended to show.

From the additional data only emotional stability and overcommitment were related to health & well-being indicators: The more participants indicated that they were emotionally stable and the less that they were overcommitted, the more signs of good health & well-being they tended to show.



Part 2: Leisure Activities and Recovery

Constructs

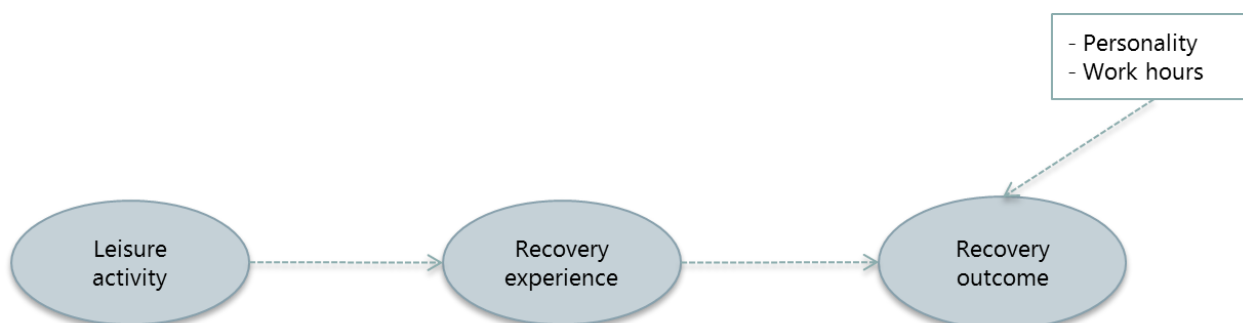
As you might remember, you were asked to indicate how many hours per week you spent on **leisure activities** such as social activities with colleagues or with family and friends (e.g. going to the pub or a party), low-strain activities (e.g. watching television, reading) and physical activities (e.g. gym, danc-

ing). For each leisure activity there were questions about so-called **recovery experiences**, processes by which recovery is believed to occur. These were relaxation, psychological detachment from work (i.e. switching off mentally) and experience of mastery (i.e. experiencing competence and proficiency).

Of the **additional data** from the first part **personality characteristics** and **working hours** were expected to be related to the recovery outcome.

Assumptions

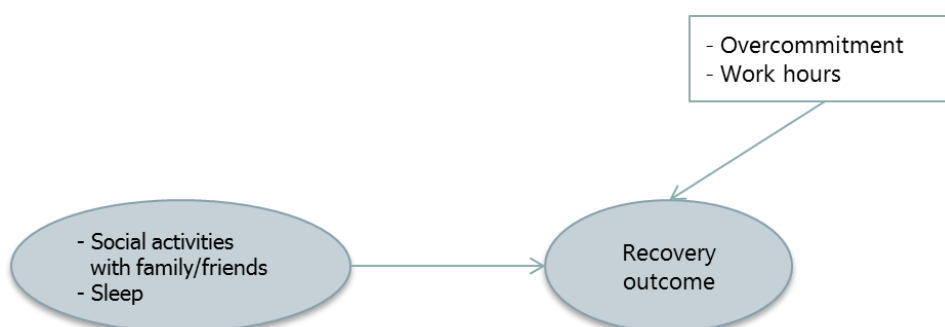
3) The more time participants spent on certain leisure activities in the past 3 to 6 months the more they experienced relaxation, psychological detachment from work and/or mastery. The more they had these experiences, the more successfully they recovered between daily working periods.



Results

3) The more time participants spent on sleep and social activities with family/friends, the more successfully they recovered between daily working periods. However, leisure activities were not related to recovery experiences and these were not related to the recovery outcome.

From the additional data only overcommitment and working hours were related to the recovery outcome: The less overcommitted participants were and the less hours they worked, the more successfully they tended to recover between working periods.



Interpretation of the Results and Practical Tips²

First of all, I need to stress that the sample of performers who participated in this study is not representative for the entire population of around 90.000 live performing artists in the UK³. Thus it remains an open question whether the results of this study are applicable to all UK performers. More likely, if at all, the results can only be applied to musicians in general as these constitute nearly 60% of the participants. Nevertheless, this study provides some important information when interpreted in the context of previous research.

Before beginning with the main results I will briefly discuss the results of the additional data, namely emotional stability, overcommitment and working hours. The results of the first part show that apart from performance anxiety and the recovery outcome, emotional stability and overcommitment are also related to health & well-being. The results of the second part indicate that apart from leisure activities, overcommitment and working hours are also related to the recovery outcome. As described above, emotional stability describes an individual's tendency to show good emotional adjustment to stressful events. Overcommitment means excessive work-related commitment, i.e. being unable to withdraw from work obligations. Hence, if you feel that you get stressed easily, work a lot and/or generally have difficulties unwinding from work, your health & well-being is in danger. Thus it is particularly important for you to deliberately allow for some leisure time each day and to engage in some of the activities described below.

Part 1: Stage Fright, Health & Well-being, and Recovery

The findings of the first part of this study show that thoughts and physiologic reactions associated with stage fright are related to health & well-being.⁴ This means the more stage fright performers experience the more they suffer from symptoms such as sleep problems, exhaustion or pain as well as they are more likely to be unsatisfied with their job and generally experience negative feelings. Thus, in the case of very intense stage fright, a performer's health & well-being can be severely damaged. Research has also shown for severe cases of performance anxiety that it impairs the performance quality, not to mention that it is very unpleasant for affected performers. For these reasons I would recommend performers suffering from intense and debilitating stage fright to seek professional help from an organisation such as BAPAM which can put you in contact with a specialist psychotherapist. Cognitive behavioural therapy, for example, has been shown to reduce severe performance anxiety quite effectively.

Most performers, however, experience only low to moderate manifestations of stage fright which are very common for any kind of public presentation. Many artists even feel that a certain degree of stage fright is indispensable for a high-quality and engaging performance, as has actually been confirmed by some studies. Nevertheless, also moderate stage fright appears to be related to impaired

² Information on previous recovery research was taken from:

http://www.beanmanaged.eu/pdf/articles/arnoldbakker/article_arnold_bakker_193.pdf

³ Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 02/2006

⁴ I argue that stage fright has an impact on health & well-being. However, it is important to note that the methods used in this study cannot prove any causal relationships. Thus, it is also possible that impaired health & well-being cause stage fright. This interpretation problem applies to all relationships that have been investigated, but as the stated cause-effect assumptions are based on existing research some evidence for them does exist.

health & well-being, according to my results. But since a reduction of stage fright is often not desirable for performers, the idea of this study was to find a way to reduce the negative impact of performance anxiety on health & well-being – namely through successful recovery between daily working periods. However, my findings suggest that successful recovery cannot reduce the harmful effects of stage fright on health & well-being, but instead it can improve performers' health & well-being directly. Hence, it is still very important, and thus the next step is to find out *how* one can achieve successful daily recovery.

Part 2: Leisure Activities and Recovery

In order to answer this question, I investigated several leisure activities and recovery experiences in the second part of the study. I studied the *daily* recovery outcome and *weekly* leisure activities, as previous research has shown that recovery taking place daily after work or during the weekend appears to be more important for protecting well-being and work performance than long holidays as their beneficial effects fade out quickly.

According to the results of this study, the more time participants spent on sleep the more successfully they recovered between daily working periods. These findings are in line with existing research that has indicated that night sleep is very important for recovery. Adults need 7 to 9 hours sleep per night on average but also a nap of 15 to 20 minutes during the day is very beneficial for recovery.⁵

A further result of this study was that time spent on social activities with family or friends (e.g., going to the pub or a party, dining, making a phone call to chat) was positively related to daily recovery. Interestingly, however, time spent on social activities with colleagues was not related to recovery. This means that leisure time spent with your colleagues is not harmful for recovery but it is not beneficial either. Consequently, if you wish to recover from any stress by engaging in a social activity, you should rather spend your leisure time with family or friends than with colleagues, unless these are also friends.

Furthermore, results indicated that time spent on low-strain activities (e.g., watching television, reading, listening to music, taking a hot bath, just relaxing on the sofa) was not related to recovery between working periods. Findings of previous research have been mixed, indicating either a positive or no effect of low-strain activities on recovery. I assume that low-strain activities need to be examined in smaller categories, differentiating, for example, between passive activities like relaxing on the sofa and more active ones like reading. So far, however, there is more evidence demonstrating that low-strain activities do not have an effect on recovery. Therefore they are not harmful but they cannot be recommended either.

The results of this study regarding physical activities (e.g., gym, football, swimming, dancing, hiking) indicated that these activities were not related to the recovery outcome. In line with results of previous studies this can be explained by the fact that I defined recovery as recovery from fatigue which is actually increased for a short time by physical activities. However, there is consistent evidence that physical activities have a positive effect on general health, vigour and mood, sleep quality, and a negative effect on depression. Therefore, despite my findings, physical activities during leisure time

⁵ If you wish to obtain more information on sleep you can find a comprehensive overview here: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfoforall/problems/sleepproblems/sleepingwell.aspx>

are recommendable for individuals working in office jobs or in professions that involve one-sided physical strain, such as instrumentalists. However, research has shown that it is important to avoid activities that call upon the same functional systems or internal resources as those required at work. Hence, individuals working in physically highly demanding professions, such as dancers or acrobats, should choose light physical leisure activities which compensate for the strain incurred during their work.⁶

Hobbies and creative activities constituted a very heterogeneous category. Therefore I formed the following smaller categories according to the activities that some of the participants had indicated: Handiwork/arts & crafts/creative activities (29 individuals), gardening (18), learning a language (8), cooking (33), singing/playing an instrument (22), going to performances/cinema (31). Interestingly, singing/playing an instrument was *not* related to recovery between working periods, whereas going to performances/cinema was. Most remarkable was, however, that *both* activity types were negatively related to psychological detachment from work (switching off mentally). That is, the more time participants spent on these activities the more they thought about work.

The finding that going to performances/cinema enhances recovery despite the fact that the participants think more of work implies that detachment from work is not necessary for successful recovery. The authors of an earlier study suggested that the *content* of work-related thought might be crucial. They showed that thinking positively about one's work can reduce fatigue. Thus, when watching performances or films in the cinema, many performers probably think positively about their work and enjoy the performances. However, when singing or playing music themselves during their leisure time, performers still might evaluate the quality of their performance and put themselves under pressure, no matter whether they regard this activity as a hobby. This pressure might neutralise any positive effects that making music may have on recovery. Consequently, this activity is not harmful for recovery but I cannot recommend it either. However, I do recommend going to performances, the cinema or similar events in order to recover from daily stress. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that only few individuals, which might not represent all performers well, engaged in one of these two activity groups and thus contributed to these results.

Cooking and learning a language both tend to relate to recovery in this study, whereas gardening and handiwork/arts & crafts/creative activities do not. However, most participants that engaged in the latter two activities spent only very few hours per week on them. Due to the statistical method used, this makes it difficult to find a relation to recovery. As other studies with more participants have shown that all these activities do relate to recovery, I nevertheless recommend these activities for recovery between working periods.

Further activities that have been shown to promote recovery are active relaxation activities, such as yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises and meditation/prayer, which are, therefore, also very recommendable to recover from any stress.

⁶ An overview of recovery strategies for sports performance that might also be interesting for dancers, acrobats, etc. can be found here: http://www.ask.net.au/downloads/USOC_Summer_2003_Recovery_Article.pdf

The results of this study did not show an influence of recovery experiences (psychological detachment from work, relaxation and mastery) on the recovery outcome. Nevertheless I will briefly describe these experiences, as previous research has demonstrated their beneficial effect on recovery and health & well-being, and I think they are useful to know in order to find the individually most suitable recovery activities.

Earlier on I mentioned a study showing that thinking positively about one's work can reduce fatigue. This does not, however, contradict other research that suggests that individuals who experience *psychological detachment from work* during leisure time report better mood, sleep quality and less fatigue, and that switching off mentally from work is particularly useful after stressful and demanding working days. Therefore, this is an important recovery experience. Likewise, the experience of *relaxation* during leisure time enhances recovery, health and sleep quality, as do humorous activities associated with *laughter*. Finally, the *experience of mastery* (experiencing competence and proficiency) enhances recovery and positive mood. Typically mastery is experienced during activities such as learning a new hobby or doing sports.

Consequently, I assume that these experiences can indicate the recovery potential of a leisure activity. Hence, in case you are not sure whether a leisure activity is beneficial for your recovery, ask yourself whether you can either switch off mentally from work (or think positively about it), laugh a lot, or experience relaxation or competence and proficiency when engaging in this activity. If at least one of these experiences applies, this activity will most certainly not impair your recovery and well-being. However, further research must investigate which additional experiences such as social support enhance recovery.

Summary of Recovery Tips

- ✓ If you feel that you suffer from severe stage fright, I would recommend seeking professional help from an organisation such as BAPAM which can put you in contact with a specialist psychotherapist.
- ✓ Recovery that takes place daily after work or during the weekend is more important for protecting health & well-being and work performance than long holidays.
- ✓ Try to sleep 7 to 9 hours, depending on how much you feel you need. A nap during the day of 15 to 20 minutes is also beneficial for recovery. For tips on improving night sleep see 'Helping yourself' here:
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfoforall/problems/sleepproblems/sleepingwell.aspx>
- ✓ For successful daily recovery between working periods engage in one or several of the following activities during your leisure time:
 - Social activities with friends or family
 - Physical activities (if you work in a physically highly demanding profession choose light physical activities which compensate for the strain incurred during work)
 - Active relaxation activities
 - Hobbies: Cooking, learning a language, gardening, arts & crafts, and especially going to concerts/theatre/cinema/etc.
- ✓ When you are not sure whether a leisure activity is beneficial for your recovery, ask yourself whether you enjoy it and whether you can either switch off mentally from work (or think positively about it), laugh a lot, or experience relaxation or competence and proficiency when engaging in this activity.
- ✓ If you feel that you get stressed easily and/or generally have difficulties unwinding from work, it is particularly important for you to deliberately allow for some leisure time each day and to engage in some of the activities described above that you enjoy.