

Investigating the Health of Musicians Studying at University

Objectives: Playing-related problems are prevalent amongst music students; a range of factors are involved in the development of these conditions therefore to improve health education and support it is necessary to understand musicians' biological, psychological and social situations. Research with student musicians in the UK primarily takes place at conservatoires; this study broadens research horizons by studying musicians enrolled at university.

Design and Methods: 282 music students participated in a survey which explored the prevalence and intensity of playing-related problems and past/present/potential engagement with health education and support. Participants were recruited during the rehearsals of eight different University Music Society ensembles. A paper survey design was utilised to gather quantitative data from a relatively large sample. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and group comparisons.

Results: Nearly 60% of the sample reported a history of playing-related problems; 22% were currently experiencing physical pain, 14% reported chronic pain and 48% reported experiencing music performance anxiety. Whilst nearly 90% would seek advice for playing-related problems, only 25% had received health education or heard of the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM), which offers free support to affected musicians.

Conclusions: Results show that musicians studying at universities are affected by playing-related problems therefore health promotion projects must be implemented at universities as well as conservatoires. This study introduces the Student Advocate Scheme which promotes health awareness and support for student musicians; results from this study support the methods utilised by this scheme and annual follow-up surveys will be conducted to evaluate progress.

Word Count: 250