

Stress in Music Managers and Artists: Pilot Study on Czech and Slovak Students

KATEŘINA VAŠÍČKOVÁ^A, ANDREA MIKOTOVÁ^{B*1},
LUCIE ŠILEROVÁ^{C*2}

^{A,B,C} Department of Music Production, Faculty of Music, Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Brno, Czech Republic

Abstract

The aim of the presented study was to do a pilot research on the comparison of the incidence of stress in a group of students of music management and art of music. We examined whether artists and music managers differ in the perception of the intensity of stress when playing (working) solo from the intensity when playing (working) in group. Furthermore, we focused on the most common stressors and main stress symptoms among music managers and artists. Total 63 students of music, cultural or art management (average age 28.6 years; 69.8 % were women) and 75 students of art of music (average age 26.7 years; 64 % were women) filled out an online questionnaire in the spring of 2016. The results show that while artists reported higher stress levels when playing solo, music managers reported higher stress levels when working in a group. A closer look showed that while only a few music managers (4,8 %) are intensely stressed when working in a team, a considerable group of artists (26 %) stated that they were most stressed out when playing solo. As their main work stressors artists mentioned blackouts, unpreparedness, and audience, music managers listed flaws in the human factor, time pressure and financial problems. Stress symptoms among artists are mainly physiological and short-term but at the same time intensive, while stress symptoms among music managers are rather long-term and related to psyche, and relationships with others.

Keywords

psychological stress, music performance, music manager, stress perception, decreased motivation, stress symptoms

1. Introduction

Psychological stress has become a large-scale problem that generates high costs for individuals, organizations and society in general (LUQUE-RECA et al. 2014). In individuals, psychological stress is associated with a range of physical and mental health states (HJELM et al. 2017). It has a negative impact on work performance and leads to decreased motivation and constant fatigue (ARMSTRONG 2009), and has deleterious effects on individuals' overall well-being (HJELM et al.,

*1 Email: a.mikotova@post.jamu.cz

*2 Email: 5576@post.jamu.cz

2017). In organizations, stress has negative effects on organizational outcomes such as performance and turnover (LU et al. 2005). Numerous working days are lost due to stress consequences. The UK Health and Safety Executive (2017) states a total number of 488,000 cases of work related stress, depression or anxiety in 2015/16 (prevalence rate 1510 per 100,000 workers) and 11.7 million working days lost due to this condition in the same period. In the United Kingdom total 37 % of all work related ill health cases and 45 % of all working days lost due to ill health were caused by stress. Furthermore, stress is frequently considered the most common disease of the modern age, which affects the society in general in terms of financial costs associated with treatment of stress and stress related diseases. To a greater or lesser degree, stress is a part of daily life for any individual.

1.1 The Concept of Stress

Hans Selye (1936) was the first to describe the so called general alarm reaction and later defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”. In modern psychology stress is mostly interpreted as appraising a situation as threatening or beyond the organism’s resources (LAZARUS/FOLKMAN 1984). In other words, stress does not result from the source of pressure itself, i.e. from the situation, but from the individual perception and appraising of that situation. Stress is a subjective process and goes along with many individual differences. Hence, some stressors have effect only on some people (KŘIVOHLAVÝ 1994).

The acute stress response leads to temporary changes in the metabolic, immune and nervous systems. Although this response could be adaptive in the short-term, long-term exposure to higher levels of stress has been associated with poorer health (LUCASSEN et al. 2014).

1.2 Job Requirements for Music Managers and Performing Artists

Work stress develops as a result of the imbalance between job requirements and the ability to cope. It is widely spread in the EU member states (MEŠKO et al. 2013). According to the UK *Health and Safety Executive* (2017) the prevalence of stress is higher in public service industries (education; health and social care; public administration and defense).

Music management and art performance are very demanding work positions, though each in a different way. They both involve many special duties, responsibilities and other forms of pressure.

Music managers take the responsibility for the cultural event from the preparation until the end. They must complete specific projects or tasks within a limited time period and often find themselves trying to reconcile incompatible demands and conflicting expectations. Their work involves many changes and uncertainties and is therefore very dynamic. From the job description it is clear that music management sets high standards on many diverse skills, such as communication, cooperation, negotiation, planning, time management, organization, decision making, and flexibility or ability to deal with unexpected situations.

Although music managers occupy a crucial position in the process of preparation, organization and realization of a concert or other cultural event, they stay 'invisible' to the audience. It is the artist who stands face to face to the audience. Musicians can give a basic concert by themselves but even the best music manager cannot organize a concert if he or she is not a perfect musician as well. The audience wants to see the artist.

Musicians are responsible for their professional performance and satisfaction of the audience and at the same time they must cope with the uncertainty of pay or work in general, frequent travel, daily rehearsing and stage fright in particular. If a music performer wants to be a professional, they must keep their fine motor dexterity and co-ordination, attention and memory, aesthetic, and interpretative skills on a highest possible level. That means years of training and intense self-evaluation (KENNY 2004). According to some researchers, performers are affected by the "general stresses related to having to perform under conditions of high adrenalin flow, anxiety, fatigue, social pressure, and financial insecurity" (LEHRER et al. 1990: 48). Sternbach (1995) describes the working conditions of professional musicians as generating a "total stress quotient" that far exceeds that observed in other professions. In the research of Kenny et al. (2004), operatic chorus artists demonstrated higher trait anxiety than a normative sample and their scores on occupational role concerns and personal strain also exceeded those of other occupations.

As poor workgroup relationship leads to lower job satisfaction and higher psychological stress (LEUNG 2009), interpersonal stressors should not be neglected. The cooperation between the music manager and the artist is crucial for both the artist and the manager. Their good cooperation leads to lower stress at both sides. After all, harmonic co-

operation and communication among all stakeholders is the cornerstone of the smooth progress of each job.

1.3 Specific Aspects of Human Resource Management in the Cultural Sector

Human resources are generally considered to be the most important resource in any organization. Varbanova (2013) emphasizes that this is particularly true in the arts, as “creativity cannot be replaced by any other type of resource” (VARBANOVA 2013:198). She states that arts organisations have the following specific features of human resource management:

- diverse characters of teams engaged in cultural production (creative, curatorial, technical, administrative, marketing...)
- high level of specialization which makes some personnel “irreplaceable” (unique voice of a solo singer for example)
- general rules for recruitment are not always followed (as talent is often one of the most important qualities of the job candidates)
- arts organisations mostly work with boards (committees, trustees, etc.), especially in the nonprofit and government sectors
- teams are often formed and dissolve after each production. Flexible structures and operating on a project basis is very common.
- unusual work schedules (especially in the performing arts, music and entertainment industries)

To the above, Krejčí (2014) adds that work teams vary in their size and their members are focused not only on artistic, but technical and production activities as well. This makes the coordination and communication with all stakeholders very demanding. The nature of the artistic environment also implies frequent use of team work with mostly informal relationships among co-workers. Balancing artistic freedom and self-realization of individuals with the needs of the whole team can be often challenging.

Personnel occupation is directly dependent, among other things, on the financial situation of the organization. Given the fact that most of the arts organizations are relying on contributions from their founders or grant systems, strategic planning (including human resources planning) is complicated. Frequent volunteer work is often used.

Although it is clear that the cultural sector has many specifics in the field of human resource management, empirical research on this topic is still in its infancy (HAUSMANN 2013).

1.4 Stress in the Work of a Manager and Artist

According to the UK *Health and Safety Executive* (2017) the main stressors at work are workload pressures, including tight deadlines and too much responsibility and a lack of managerial support. As typical factors contributing to stress Křivohlavý (2003) lists work overload, tight deadlines, excessively large responsibility, unexplained responsibilities, contact with people, sleep deprivation, grueling pursuit of career and relations between people.

While a large number of books and articles refer to managers' stress in many different work domains, there is only little research on stress among musicians or artists in general. Sternbach (1995) even calls musicians "a neglected working population".

Given that studies focused on the comparison of stressors and stress level of art managers and artists are lacking, we decided to do a pilot study aimed at the Czech and Slovak student population. We proceed from the fact that both study programs (music management and art of music) in Czech and Slovak universities put emphasis on practice and therefore we do not expect significant differences compared to the target group in the working population.

The presented study focused on the following research questions:

1. Do artists and music managers perceive different intensity of stress when playing (working) solo than when playing (working) in group?
2. What are the most common stressors of music managers and artists?
3. What are the main stress symptoms among music managers and in artists?

2. Method

In order to investigate stress in music managers and artists, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to Czech and Slovak students. The total of 138 students participated. Since we were not able to obtain a sample of students of music management that would have a comparable size to the sample of students of art of music, we included not only students of music management, but also students of cultural and art management. The study programs are very similar and all graduates are well prepared to do music management in their future work life. Thus, when we refer to music managers in the text below, we mean students

of music, cultural or art management. Table 1 shows schools involved in the presented study.

Artists		Managers	
School	Frequency	School	Frequency
Faculty of Music; Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno	37	Faculty of Music; Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno	22
Academy of Performing Arts in Prague	35	Faculty of Theater; Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno	8
Conservatory in Brno	2	Academy of Performing Arts in Prague	6
Faculty of Art; Masaryk University*	1	Faculty of Art; Masaryk University	14
		University of Performing Arts in Bratislava	7
		University of J. E. Purkyně in Ústí nad Orlicí	6

*graduate of Conservatory in Brno

Tab. 1: *Schools involved in the presented study.*

The sample of music managers consisted of 63 participants, 19 (30,2 %) men and 44 (69,8 %) women. Average age 28.6 years. The sample of students of art of music consisted of 75 participants, 27 (36 %) men and 48 (64 %) women. Average age 26.7 years.

The data collection was carried out in the spring of 2016. The electronic questionnaire was distributed by e-mail from the study department or by Facebook.

Participants filled out demographic information, scored their perceived intensity of stress during solo performance (or individual work in music managers) and during group interpretation (or work in team in music managers) on a five-level Likert scale. They answered an open question referring to defining three most common stressors during playing or organizing an event and finally they filled out a checklist of biological, psychological and behavioral stress reactions, including the possibility of an open answer. The number of answers in the checklist was not limited.

3. Results

3.1 Perceived stress intensity

The highest intensity of stress in solo performance states 26 % of artists, while only 12 % of music managers is stressed at maximum when working individually. In our sample no artist stated to be stressed only minimally when performing solo comparing with 11 % in the group of music managers (individual work).

In the case of group performance (resp. teamwork), no one from the group of artists and only nearly 5 % of music managers stated the highest intensity of stress. Almost no amount of stress was stated by 28 % of artists and only 6 % of music managers.

Artists – solo performance			Music managers – individual work		
Stress intensity	Frequency	%	Stress intensity	Frequency	%
1	0	0	1	7	11.1
2	2	2.7	2	11	17.5
3	30	41.1	3	12	19.1
4	22	30.1	4	25	39.7
5	19	26	5	8	12.7
Artists – group performance			Music managers – teamwork		
Stress intensity	Frequency	%	Stress intensity	Frequency	%
1	21	28.4	1	4	6.4
2	31	41.9	2	20	31.8
3	16	21.6	3	21	33.3
4	6	8.1	4	15	23.8
5	0	0	5	3	4.8

Note: 1 = minimum amount of stress; 5 = maximum amount of stress

Tab. 2: *Perceived stress intensity in solo performance (individual work) and group performance (teamwork).*

3.2 Work stressors

Artists stated fear of blackouts and unpreparedness as the biggest stressors in music performance. They are also stressed by the audience. Music managers mainly refer to flaws in the human factor (such as communication with the artists, unreliability or anger and envy in the workplace) and time pressure. Financial problems came third on the list of stressors in music management. Table 3 shows all given answers.

Artists			Music managers		
Stressor	Frequency	%	Stressor	Frequency	%
Fear from blackout	22	12,5	Flaws in the human factor	40	34,7
Unpreparedness	22	12,5	Time pressure	38	33,0
Audience	21	11,9	Financial problems	12	10,4
Fear and insecurity	18	10,2	Unforeseen situations	9	7,8
Pressure	18	10,2	Low attendance	9	7,8
Circumstances beyond one's control	16	9,1	Other	7	6,1
Difficult repertoire	14	7,9			
Physiological problems	11	6,3			
Sense of responsibility	9	5,1			
Mistakes in interpretation	8	4,5			
Impaired concentration	7	4,0			
Limits of the instrument	6	3,4			
Other	4	2,3			

Tab. 3: *Work stressors.*

Note: The group 'Other' included fear of failure, self-esteem and self-evaluation (artists), and lack of sleep, technical problems, fear of failure, weather, legal affairs, bad reviews, collision of terms, traffic and the necessity of speaking in public (music managers).

3.3 Stress symptoms

While artists experience mainly biological symptoms, such as heartbeat, excessive sweating and frequent urge to urinate, music managers suffered not only biological problems, such as heartbeat and abdominal pain, but mainly psychological problems, such as increased irritability, excessive worry and torment and rapid mood changes. Details are shown in Table 4.

Stress symptoms	Artists		Music managers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Heartbeat	53	70.7	33	51.5
Pain and tightness on chest	14	18.7	7	10.6
Abdominal pain	20	26.7	21	31.8
Frequent urge to urinate	25	33.3	10	15.2
Sexual problems	1	1.3	2	3
Muscle tension in the spine	9	12	4	6.1
Migraine	3	4	7	10.6
Excessive sweating	38	50.7	17	25.8

Rapid mood changes	8	10.7	19	28.8
Inability to sympathize with others	6	8	9	13.6
Excessive worry and torment	19	25.3	34	51.5
Reduced contact with others	19	25.3	16	24.2
Increased irritability	21	21	39	60.6
Other	27	36		21.2

Tab. 4: *Stress symptoms.*

Note: The group 'Other' included muscle stiffness, insomnia, flushing, cold hands, feeling of tension, clenched stomach, loss of appetite, difficulty in breathing, yawning, tremors, dry mouth, dizziness, indigestion among artists and chills, rapid breathing, the need for nicotine, bad dreams, hand tremors, insomnia, loss of appetite, increased adrenaline, tics among music managers

4. Discussion

The comparison of perceived stress intensity among artists and music managers is indispensable without distinguishing individual work from teamwork. Especially in music, where playing (or singing) the whole concert solo puts much higher demands on the quality of the performance. It requires higher concentration, better preparation, freedom from stage fright and fatigue, and puts higher demands on memory and on the musician's condition. Thus, it is not surprising that artists in our research sample were mainly stressed when playing solo. On the other hand, music managers were reporting higher stress level when working in a group. Although a music manager can rely on the help of his colleagues when working in a team, the necessity of dealing with others might bring some considerable risks and stressors as well. One of them is higher amount of people the manager has to communicate with, which can lead to misunderstandings or information distortions. It is also possible that troubles in interpersonal relation in the work team might be a considerable stressor. We recommend a further research to examine these possible explanations.

A closer look shows that while only a few music managers are stressed at the maximum level when working in a team, a considerable group of artists stated to be most stressed out when playing solo. This finding suggests that being a musician puts high standards on the ability to cope with acute stress.

As to the main work stressors, artists stated blackouts, unpreparedness, and audience, music managers listed flaws in the human factor, time pressure and financial problems. Although the main stressors were different for the two groups, there was a considerable concordance in defining them inside each group at the same time. Stressors among music managers are overall similar to frequently cited symptoms of stress, while artists represent a specific target group.

Stressors and stress symptoms among artists could also be interpreted as stage fright. This phenomenon is specific for this work group. It is closely connected with the physical state of the individual and is rather short-term (although there might be individual differences) and at the same time intensive. Stress symptoms among music managers are related to the psyche and relationships with others and rather long-term (as they are present during the whole process of preparation of an event).

Findings of the presented study must be interpreted in the context of the following limitations. First, all data were selfreports. One should not underestimate the role of percept bias. Also, the number of women outweighed the number of men and furthermore, the aim of our study was to obtain pilot findings from student population. It is clear that a further research on working population in these occupational branches is needed. Nevertheless, we believe that the presented study brings some very interesting findings. In a further research it would be interesting to focus in a detailed way on one cooperating team of musicians and their managers. This could bring a new light on this neglected research area.

Authors

Kateřina Vašíčková studied Music management on Janáček Academy of Music and Performing arts and Guitar at Brno Conservatory. Nowadays she serves as secretary of International Guitar Festival in Brno.

Andrea Mikotová is a assistant professor at Janáček Academy of Music and Performing arts with main interest in music therapy and somatic psychotherapy. She earned her PhD in Psychology at Masaryk University Brno and has recently completed a two-year course of music therapy accredited by the Music Therapy Association of the Czech Republic (CZMTA).

Lucie Pešl Šilerová works as associate professor at the Music Faculty, Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (JAMU) in Brno, Czech Republic. She is focused on research on symphony orchestras, in particular on their organization, structures, financial sustainability and social functions. Her interests lie also in historical research about exiled artists and musicians (native groups of resettled Czechs in Minnesota (United States, after 1858) and Austrians in London (after 1938). She received her master degree (MA) from the JAMU, her economical master degree (Ing.) from the University of Economics in Prague, Czech Republic, and her doctorate (Ph.D.) from the JAMU.

References

- ARMSTRONG, Michael (2009): *Armstrong's Handbook of Performance Management. An Evidence-based Guide to Delivering High Performance*. London: Kogan Page Publishers.
- HAUSMANN, Andrea (2013): Empirische Forschung zum Personalmanagement in Kulturbetrieben. Ein Literaturüberblick. – In: *Zeitschrift für Personalforschung* 27/2. 103-124.
- Health and Safety Executive (2016): *Work related stress, anxiety and depression statistics in Great Britain 2016*. <<http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf?pdf=stress>> [23.02.2017].
- HJELM, Lisa/HANDA, Sudhanshu/ HOOP, Jacobus de/PALERMO, Tia (2017): Poverty and Perceived Stress: Evidence from Two Unconditional Cash Transfer Programs in Zambia. – In: *Social Science & Medicine* 177, 110-117.
- KENNY, Dianna T./DAVIS, Pamela/OATES, Jenni (2004): Music Performance Anxiety and Occupational Stress Amongst Opera Chorus Artists and their Relationship with State and Trait Anxiety and Perfectionism. – In: *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 18, 757-777.
- KŘIVOHLAVÝ, Jaro (1994): *Jak zvládat stres* [Coping with Stress]. Grada: Avicenum.
- KŘIVOHLAVÝ, Jaro (2003): *Psychologie zdraví* [Health Psychology]. Praha: Portál.
- LAZARUS, Richard S./FOLKMAN, Susan (1984): *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*. New York: Springer.
- LEHRER, Paul/GOLDMAN, Nina/STROMMEN, Erik (1990): A Principal Components Assessment of Performance Anxiety Among Musicians. – In: *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 5, 12-18.
- LEUNG, Mei-yung, CHAN, Yee-Shan, YU, Jingyu (2009): Integrated Model for the Stressors and Stresses of Construction Project Managers in Hong Kong. – In: *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 135/2, 126-134.
- LU, Chang-qin/SIU, Oi-ling/COOPER, Cary (2005): Managers' Occupational Stress in China: The Role of Self-efficacy. – In: *Personality and Individual Differences* 38/3, 569-578.
- LUCASSEN, Paul J./PUESSNER, Jens/SOUSA, Nuno et al. (2014): Neuropathology of Stress. – In: *Acta neuropathologica* 127/1, 109-135.
- LUQUE-RECA, Octavio/AUGUSTO-LANDA, José María/PULIDO-MARTOS, Manuel (2014): La relación entre la inteligencia emocional percibida y la salud mental en directivos y mandos intermedios: El papel del estrés percibido como mediador. – In: *Ansiedad y Estrés* 20/1, 61-73.
- MEŠKO, Maja/ERENDA, Ivan/VIDEMŠEK, Mateja/KARPLJUK, Damir/ROBLEK, Vasja/ŠTIHEC, Jože (2013): Relationship Between Stress Coping Strategies and Absenteeism Among Middle-level Managers. – In: *Management-Journal of Contemporary Management Issues* 18/1, 45-57.
- SELYE, Hans (1936): A Syndrome Produced by Diverse Nocuous Agents. – In: *Nature* 138/3479, 32.
- STERNBACH, David J. (1995): Musicians. a Neglected Working Population in Crisis. – In: Sauter, Steven L./ Murphy, Lawrence R. (Eds.), *Organizational Risk Factors for Job Stress*. Washington/DC: American Psychological Association, 283-302.
- VARBANOVA, Lidia, (2013): *Strategic Management in the Arts*. New York: Routledge.