Can Music Make You Sick?

A Study into the Incidence of Musicians' Mental Health

Part 2: Qualitative Study and Recommendations

Client: Help Musicians UK

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About This Report

Help Musicians UK commissioned this report (the first UK academic study on the incidence of mental health and musicians) in response to the charity's observation around the rise in the number of calls and applications from musicians with mental health problems and is seeking to understand and quantify their significance as well as find solutions to this issue within the music industry.

This report is the second part of an extensive academic research project, which concluded January 2017.

Part 1: Pilot Survey Report was published 1st November 2016 and can be freely accessed here.

The commissioners had a collaborative role in the design of the study, however, they had no role in: the conduct of the study; the collection, analysis and interpretation of data; the decision of the submission of the manuscript; or in the preparation, review or approval of the manuscript. The views expressed here are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the commissioners.

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About Help Musicians UK

Help Musicians UK is the leading independent music charity in the country. It has an unrivalled reputation for providing health and welfare support to working and retired musicians and also provides additional investment in organisations as well as emerging and mid-career artists to further artistic development.

Its independence enables the charity to be a truly representative voice for musicians and the wider industry. In preparation for its centenary the charity has set the ambitious fundraising target of raising £21m by 2021.

Registered charity No. 228089 020 7239 9100

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1. Executive Summary

> **"People might have a susceptibility to being anxious or being depressed, but if there's an industry that's going to draw that out of you it's the music business"**
> - Jamie Binns, Lateral Management

On November 1st 2016, Help Musicians UK published the results of our pilot survey *Can Music Make You Sick? Music and Depression* (Gross and Musgrave, 2016). This was the largest known academic research project ever conducted on the mental health of musicians and music industry professionals working in the UK, and was carried out by a team from the University of Westminster/MusicTank. From this pilot survey that garnered 2,211 responses, it emerged that 71.1% of respondents identified as having suffered from panic attacks and/ or anxiety, and 68.5% from depression. As the UK's leading charity for professional musicians working in any musical genre and at any stage in their careers, and who are focused on delivering the highest level of support tailored specifically to the needs of musicians, the questions Help Musicians UK needed answering were 'why?', and, 'what can be done?'. This second phase of 'Can Music Make You Sick' has sought to address these questions.

In semi-structured interviews with twenty-six musicians from multiple genres, of varying ages, career stages, and locations throughout the UK (section 4. p12 'What we did'), this research sought to investigate the source of these high levels of depression and anxiety, by asking the musicians themselves what they felt might be causing or contributing to their mental health issues. Central to this is, firstly, precarity, which is both financial and experiential in nature. Secondly, there are a number of cultural norms and working conditions for musicians that can have a profound impact on their well-being. We suggest these are; the role of feedback, the difficulty in defining 'success', the impact their careers can have on relationships, and issues surrounding equality and diversity understood as access to opportunity.

The complex inter-relationship of each of these factors leads us to suggest that structural, compositional features of a musical career might indeed contribute towards high levels of anxiety and depression amongst musicians.

Although the causes of mental health problems are multi-faceted, there appears to be a perceptible and uncomfortable link between the epidemic of mental ill-health amongst musicians, and the working conditions within the music industries. In this sense, working in the music industries appears to be making people sick.

Following interviews and consultations with music professionals and mental health services providers (Appendix 5, p39) working across many different areas of the music industries, from therapists to record company executives, this report makes a number of policy recommendations, which encompass:

1. A program of continued research and education about this issue.
2. An industry code of practice that might take a number of forms.
3. A peer-led service of inter-artistic support networks.

> **"I think everyone is now talking about depression in the music industry, it is a real thing- the dangers of the preforming world have always been there, the highs are very high and then there is a kind of built in obsolescence that means the lows are very, very low."**
> - Neil Barnes, Leftfield

2. Key Findings

1. Music maker's relationship to their work is integral to their sense of self. It is how they define themselves.

2. The language of those working in the music industries focuses on the need for self-belief and the importance of believing in one's work. This embodiment of one's work with one's identity leaves these workers vulnerable to instability and unpredictability i.e. subject to the precarity of the environment they work within.

3. Music makers appear to be reflective and self-critical. They exist in an environment of constant critical feedback – an endless feedback loop of comments – that is just as significant as being ignored and overlooked.

4. Damaging precarity and unpredictability is at the very heart of a musical career.

5. Musicians often work several different jobs as part of a portfolio career that can result in them being afraid to take a break, and a culture of applying themselves '24/7'.

6. The network character of the music sector makes it difficult for workers to reveal insecurities or to admit vulnerability because of hyper-competition and wanting to appear 'on top' of things.

7. Family support and the support of close friends and partners is highly valued but also open to abuse and feelings of guilt.

8. The working environment is often anti-social and unsympathetic. Some musicians experience sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and coercion.

9. Musicians seeking help find it hard to afford. Finding support can be a long and inconsistent process.

10. A duty of care beyond direct fiduciary duties is often hard to establish as the majority of these musicians are self-employed.

11. There is a need to increase awareness across the music industries to improve working conditions and to enhance a professional code of conduct. Research might be prudent on how other high competition industries cope with over-supply and sustainability.

12. More work is required that looks at inequality, discrimination, lack of diversity and how that impacts the working conditions and climate.

3. Introduction

This report expands on the themes and findings highlighted by our Phase 1 Pilot Survey Report – Music And Depression, published 1st November 2016, ([download here](#)), that indicated that 71.1% of respondents suffered from panic attacks/anxiety, and 68.5% from depression. For the next stage of this research we set out to answer two fundamental questions: 'why?', and 'what might be done about it?'. In this sense, this report for MusicTank explores in qualitative depth, the experiences of musicians in the United Kingdom to help us make sense of these statistics.

3.1 Setting: 'The Music Industry'?

The music industry is commonly understood as a singular entity that is often portrayed as a place of shared concerns and goals. However, as many observers and academics have pointed out, this singular term is misleading, and the very idea of a united place belies the reality, which is a tension-ridden music environment, full of competing interests and industries. It is within this highly competitive and networked environment that music makers and music workers operate, and in this sense, we agree with Williamson and Cloonan (2016:3), that "musicians are best conceived of as particular sorts of workers seeking remuneration within a complex matrix of industries clustered in and around music" [1]. We therefore prefer to use the plural term - music industries.

As all those who took part in this research pointed out, one's experience of working in music can change daily and very much depends 'where you are coming from and where you are at within it'. In this hyper-competitive atmosphere the rules and boundaries are often difficult to identify and thus negotiate.

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[1] Williamson, J and Cloonon, M (2016) *Players' Work Time: A History of the British Musicians' Union 1893-2013,* Oxford University Press

These different but interconnecting music businesses are full of competing stakeholder interests, contradictory opinions, and lobbying of all kinds, but it is noticeable how often the loudest voices and dominant opinions are not in fact those of the artists and musicians who supply the raw material that the majority of these music businesses exploit one way or another, again a point made by many of the interviewees. Somewhat ironically, although they are all engaged in making sound, it is 'being listened to' that seems to be one of their central problems.

Although much of the work of the music industries is very public facing, where it is often said that all publicity is good publicity, criticising working practices within the music industries can be difficult and complicated, no matter where one is situated. All artists exhibiting or voicing concerns about their emotional or mental wellbeing can potentially be shut down both privately by their employers and their managers, and publicly by the media and even their fans who might 'accuse' artists of being attention seeking or self-indulgent. Additionally, the high incidence of mental health issues amongst musicians is, anecdotally, often dismissed on the basis that music 'attracts' individuals with predispositions to such conditions. However, recently there appears to be a sea change regarding attitudes to anxiety and the mental wellbeing of music makers, performers and music business professionals.

3.2 Research Context

There has been some noticeable research in this area that has caught the attention of wider media, starting with Bellis et al (2012) in their paper *'Dying to be Famous'* [2], which drew attention to musician's mortality rates by analysing biographical information and comparing them to public statistics. This paper explored the music business

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[2] Bellis MA, Hughes K, Sharples O, et al - *Dying To Be Famous: retrospective cohort study of rock and pop star mortality and its association with adverse childhood experiences*.
BMJ Open 2012;2:e002089. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2012- 002089
http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/2/6/e002089.full (Last accessed 04.01.17)

'myths' of dying young, appearing to show that successful musicians do in fact have a shortened life expectancy. This study, along with the others outlined below, have begun to look closely at the working and living conditions of both musicians and the wider music industries workforce. With the growing emphasis on the importance of the creative industries, particularly as a key driver of the UK knowledge economy, it is imperative that we understand the implications of how these specific working conditions are experienced. This report seeks to contribute to this new area of research.

Help Musicians UK's own Health and Wellbeing survey (2014) also highlighted anxiety and depression in musicians, work which was expanded by Gross and Musgrave (2016) in the first phase of 'Can Music Make You Sick?'. Furthermore, research by Vaag, Giæver and Bjerkeset (2014:205) on Norwegian musicians' psychosocial environment, found "an unpredictable future, threats to the family/work balance and significant amounts of external pressure" contributed towards "a higher degree of mental health problems, family/ work conflicts and sleep-related problems among workers in creative occupations than in other professions"[3]. These findings coupled with our own experiences of working in the music industries, alongside what appeared to be increasing reports in the media of mental health issues amongst known pop musicians - notably by Kenny (2014) [4] - led to this research.

Additionally, there have been two very informative reports[5] published by Victoria University (Eynde, Fisher & Sonn, 2016) working in partnership with Entertainment

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[3] Vaag,, J, Giæver, F, and Bjerkeset, O (2014) *Specific Demands and Resources in the Career of the Norweigan Freelance Musician* - Arts & Health, Vol.6(3), pp. 2015-222: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17533015.2013.863789 (Last accessed 05.01.17)

[4] Kenny DT - *Stairway To Hell: Life And Death In The Pop Music industry.* Publ. The Conversation https://theconversation.com/stairway-to-hell-life-and-death-in-the-pop-music-industry-32735 (Last accessed 04.01.16)

[5] Dr Julie van den Eynde PhD, Professor Adrian Fisher PhD, Associate Professor Christopher Sonn PhD *Pride, Passion & Pitfalls And Working In The Australian Industry.* Publ. by University of Victoria http://entertainmentassist.org.au/vic/entertainmentassist/uploads/files/Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry_Final Report_Oct16.pdf (Last accessed 04.01.17)

Assist - an Australian charity set up to help people working within the Australian Entertainment Industry. Their reports uncovered startling statistics regarding suicidality amongst musicians, as well as high levels of drug and alcohol usage. Fortuitously, their second report was published just a few weeks before Help Musicians UK published the results of our phase 1 Pilot Survey, and their findings provide a useful point of comparison with those uncovered herein. Certainly, the UK music industries are much larger than the Australian music sector, and the focus of our two projects differ in regard to aspects of our methodological approach and scope. For example, we did not raise the question of suicidality or enquire as to our respondent's drug or alcohol consumption levels as that was beyond the remit of our research. However, it is striking how similar both studies' respective findings are, and how specifically those from the Australian project labelled 'Group One', i.e. musicians, experience similar working conditions with equivalent stresses and resulting outcomes as their UK counterparts. Overall, the Australian study's findings further support those of our study.

It is clear from this emergent literature that seeking to make sense of the complex relationship between the structural composition of the music industries, and its potential relationship with the mental wellbeing of musicians, is both timely and necessary.

> "I have moments where it's less crippling, but there are times where I just have massive self-doubt and think, 'What am I even… who am I kidding?' You swing between these two extremes of everything being brilliant and extreme confidence, to complete despair."
> - Singer-songwriter, London

4. What we did

We determined to explore in qualitative depth, the voices behind our pilot survey findings in order to learn more about the working conditions of these music industries professionals. As our pilot survey indicated that 68% of respondents reported feeling depressed, and 71% were suffering from anxiety, the question we wanted to know was, why? In order to ascertain this, in our capacity as cultural sociologists and music business academics and practitioners, we wanted to hear the views of musicians themselves; what did *they* feel was making them ill?

As such, we carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a small number of pilot survey respondents, and those drawn from our professional networks. Participants were selected via maximum variation sampling to ensure a degree of representativeness. In total, 26 musicians were interviewed, comprising:

- An even gender split.
- A wide variety of musical genres (including Pop, Soul, Jazz, Urban, Reggae, Classical, Rock, Dance, Folk, Opera, Dubstep and Musical Theatre).
- Proportionate geographical spread (London [50%], Manchester [10%], Newcastle [8%], Bristol [8%], Birmingham [8%], Edinburgh [4%], Glasgow [4%], Belfast [4%], and Cardiff [4%]); and…
- broad age ranges, and stages in their careers (from artists just starting out, to long established professionals)…

Additionally, we wanted to hear the perspectives of key stakeholders from within the music industries, about how they understood the challenges facing both artists and themselves vis-à-vis mental health. We therefore spoke with several senior music business executives, from record companies and publishers to artist managers and tour managers of some of the biggest acts in the UK. The interviewees were drawn

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from both our professional music networks and those who responded to the coverage engendered by our earlier survey.

Finally, in order to guide our Recommendations (section 6, p26), we spoke to providers of mental health services to build up a picture of the existing mental health services landscape (Appendix 5, p39). By comparing this to the responses in our interviews, it was possible to identify gaps in existing health care provision based on the stated desires of musicians themselves.

5. Findings – What Is Making Musicians Sick?

"If you've got a creative spark in you and you're a musician you need to use it. That's where that phrase comes from I think: 'it can be a curse.' Because if you're not being creative then it can make you ill, it can make you depressed, and I found that to be very true in the times that I've not been creative." - Yvonne Ellis, Manchester, 2016

The act of music making is fundamental to musicians. It is central to defining their identity, as well as being a great source of pleasure and comfort to all the musicians and music professionals we interviewed. For many, it was overwhelmingly their great love. It was noticeable how many of the musicians interviewed talked about music as a person or a relationship they are in, as an embodied, living thing – they would speak of "having problems in our relationship", or that there was a "third person in your relationship" (Producer, Manchester). This centrality of music to their core identity - their sense of self - seems fundamental to understanding how these musicians make sense of their daily lives and struggles.

Two elemental and interwoven themes emerged across our interviews. We have called these 'Precarity' and 'Cultural Norms and Working Conditions'. Each of these themes have further sub-categories and will be explored below.

5.1 Precarity

One of the clearest themes to emerge from our interviews was how these musicians felt that the precariousness and insecurity of their work had the potential to be, or in many cases actually was, psychologically damaging, causing them often to live in a constant state of stress, unable to fully relax or 'switch off'.

5.1.1 Precarity of Earnings

Financial precariousness is a primary source of anxiety for musicians. Musicians alongside many other freelancer professional working in the music industries, work on short-term or even zero-hours contracts, a work pattern often referred to as a portfolio career. However, for musicians, and especially those starting out, many of these income streams are in themselves precarious, with no pattern or knowledge of when or where the next job may appear. The actual musical work in their portfolio was often a loss leader. One suggested: "I wake up in the morning, and the first thing I think about is money…it's constant stress" (Dubstep producer, London). Another said: "I love working, absolutely freaking love it, but it's not sustainable to have to work all the time and just to be able to pay your rent and not knowing every month that you're going to be able to pay your rent" (Indie/ Musical Theatre, Belfast).

These difficulties musicians have in acquiring any form of financial stability have a number of consequences, not least that they feel **they cannot adequately plan their lives or their futures.** As one explained "not quite being able to set goals that are concrete mean it's hard to plan" (Folk singer, Cardiff). The result of this is that musicians experience a chain of uncertainty from housing needs to cash flow problems that make them reliant on other forms of support from family to partners, to some state support if they can qualify. These difficulties impact on their sense of self.

> "It starts to make you sick, because you're seeing everyone else prosper and you're like 'what am I doing wrong'?" (R&B singer/ songwriter, London).

For more established professionals who earned their living from music, their source of financial anxiety was different. One music producer we spoke to, in his mid-thirties, who had enjoyed a successful music career for 15 years (both financially – he was a home owner in central London – and musically, having numerous gold and platinum selling records) stated: "I still feel [my entire career] could disappear within 18

months…You feel the wolves at the door at any moment" (Pop/ urban producer, London). As Jamie Binns of Lateral Management told us: "You can make tons of money overnight, but you can also lose tons of money overnight", and this creates **an environment of constant instability and pressure**.

The interviewees often described this as 'relentless' pressure that they felt manifests itself in exhaustion and anxiety, but also simultaneously, feelings of 'guilt' and anxiety about taking any time off. An indie musician and theatre producer from Belfast told us: "I haven't had any days off that I can remember, for years, and felt really guilty if I thought about having time off… It was just kind of constant and this was all just to try to keep myself going. And pay off the debts… and also be able to keep putting money into making music and recording and releasing and making mistakes… Or just pay to be on tour" (Indie/Musical Theatre, Belfast).

5.1.2 Precarity of Experience

Another key theme from our interviews relating to precariousness concerns what we have called 'The Precarity of Experience'. This refers to the unpredictability and perceived randomness of a musical career, and suggests that the challenges of precarity within the music sector transcend solely financial concerns. Indeed, **precarity and unpredictability, our respondents suggest, is at the very heart of a musical career**.

> "Talent doesn't necessarily have everything to do with it. There are some incredibly talented musicians and writers who never get to see the light of day because they just don't have that opportunity and they don't get that particular break. And I think one of the sources of great frustration… is just not having that opportunity… so sometimes you just think you're shouting into a vacuum. It's incredibly exhausting and frustrating." - Anonymous major record label executive

A London-based songwriter and producer suggested: "The longer you work in music, the more you get a sense of a real tangible randomness**… It would be nice to work somewhere a bit more logical"** (Pop/ urban producer, London)**.** Success then is often understood as "lots of little bits of magic that come together at a certain time" (Producer, Manchester). As this, and the quote from the record company executive above, suggest, attaining any degree of 'success' (itself a constantly contested term by our interviewees) as a musician requires not only musical talent and hard work (these two components were often spoken of as prerequisites and being 'a given'), but also must include more difficult elements to predict such as, luck, randomness, timing, and circumstance.

Throughout this process, these musicians' works can simply sit on laptops, never being heard as they become lost in the system - "in terms of the manifestation of ideas and the frustration of getting them out, it almost becomes toxic" (Singer/ songwriter, Manchester). In this sense, according to several of the musicians, creating music and then having it heard in the end ultimately came down to luck. This career turbulence is widely acknowledged across the music sector as problematic but many see it as an inevitable part of hyper-competition and the nature of subjective communication. Regardless of the problems it causes, music industry stakeholders do not see who should be accountable or if anything could be done differently.

> "How much is that the responsibility of the record company? I don't know, but it's funny, you show people a lifestyle, and it's not a real life style because while you're doing promotion, you're flying around the world, you're in nice hotels, you have a glimpse of hits, you have fans, and they can just disappear and go in a heartbeat. So I'm not sure whether that's something that a record company should have to think about."
> - Anonymous major record label executive.

In an illuminating exchange, a producer from London stated the following:

> **"The level of mental resolve required every single day to go to work to do this incredibly hard thing, knowing that it more than likely will fail, is incredible. You develop a cold sense of realism… You get worn out by the relentless line of knockbacks and failures and disappointments, which are completely inevitable… Imagine you were a footballer and you were playing every day, but the goal was barely the size of the football, where every match is 0-0, and where people scored once every six months or once a year… People would be too depressed to get on the pitch. That's what it's like."** - Pop/ urban producer, London

Even if you are no longer experiencing financial difficulties, precarity and anxiety simply evolve. For example, as artists become more well known, and are travelling and touring, they then lose control of their diary, and ultimately, lose control over their lives: "At the bottom, the instability is not having any money; at the top, it's not having any freedom" (Jamie Binns, Lateral Management). When artists are experiencing a career 'buzz' or success, these artists spoke of working all the time and having no personal time: "the insecurity of it can be really scary" (Opera singer, London). As a platinum selling, BRIT Award-nominated London-based dance music producer told us: "It's very hard to plan your future and things change regularly. So whilst not sleeping, touring every day, [and] having pressure from the label to come up with your next single or making sure your brand is building… the travelling, the no sleep and being awake and DJ-ing at nightclubs at 3 in the morning… that all rolled into one is a recipe for anxiety… The lack of control is essentially what it comes down to." Many of the interviewees talked of lack of sleep, and sleep deprivation is similarly highlighted as an issue in the aforementioned Australian study.

Precariousness then, in all its forms, and the anxiety this engenders, is fundamental to the lives of musicians.

This does not vanish when financial concerns are lifted, and in some respects it gets worse. Instability for musicians then, transcends just financial precariousness; the industry itself is one of blurred-lines and perennial uncertainty. Music manager Jamie Binns (Lateral Management) suggested in an interview: "When there's instability, anxiety and depression will creep in…[and] this is the most unstable career that I can possible imagine someone being in".

5.2 Cultural Norms and Working Conditions

The second emergent theme to come from our interviews relate to the ways in which the terrain of the music industries, and cultural norms that (have) develop(ed) within these cultural industries, can be damaging to the mental health of those trying to forge careers. The concerns that were raised most frequently by our interviewees were: the role of feedback/ critique; the difficulties in defining success; the nature of their interpersonal relationships; and the role of equality, diversity and safety.

5.2.1 The Feedback Economy

Many of the interviewees described themselves as highly self-critical and reflexive by 'nature'. However, they all identified living in a state of constant feedback whereby the level of comments and criticism is experienced as overwhelming and exhausting. They spoke of comments from other musicians, comments on social media, posts on Facebook and of their lives being dominated by this atmosphere of feedback, trying to be in on it, whilst simultaneously trying to escape it.

Musicians are, as they told us in interviews, passionate about creating their art that is the purest reflection of whatever it is they are trying to communicate and do. However, this same passion, coupled with enormous investments both financial and otherwise in

their music, leaves them vulnerable to the criticisms of others. As one interviewee suggested: "Music is you, stark naked in the street" (Producer, Manchester). In this environment the process of feedback that is inevitable when sharing your music with your peers, your manager, and your audience, can engender profound feelings of anxiety, and, depending on the form and nature of the feedback, depression:

> "Writing and then putting [music] out in a public domain and waiting for some kind of feedback… That can make you really vulnerable"
> - Folk musician, Cardiff.

Throughout this research, musicians talked about how managers or record companies would often quite callously dismiss their music. A singer/ songwriter from London told us that anxiety can emanate from "waiting for the validation of someone to tell you you're great" (R&B singer/ songwriter, London), only to lapse into feelings of depression from a "kind of the worthlessness that comes with it when you work so hard on something and it doesn't 'pay off'" (Indie/ Musical Theatre, Belfast). This spiral of anxiety leading to depression in an environment of high levels of perceived criticism was also apparent amongst performers: "I honestly believed that every time I went on stage, every single person in the room was an expert in music and was critiquing every note." (Musical director, Newcastle).

Whilst this might not be unique to musicians per se, what makes these comparisons particularly challenging is that they occur in an environment where artists' own 'successes' are so hard to make sense of.

5.2.2 Defining Success

All the musicians we spoke to from all musical genres clearly felt, and many could evidence, that they had spent a huge amount of time becoming a musician; hours of practice, rehearsals, lessons, and often university fees, as well as private lessons paid for by supportive or keen parents. Several had studied to Masters level, but they were

all plagued one way or another with self-doubt and anxiety about how they were valued, not only by their fellow musicians but also the fans, their audience, and the wider music sector. The question of success was extremely taxing for all the interviewees and money alone was never the sole solution or barometer.

For artists then, what is success and what is value? Everybody wants to be "successful", but no one quite knows how, or even what success is.

The question of how musicians define themselves outside of an economic structure appears to be a source of great anxiety and questioning. If the work they do creates little financial benefit, how else might they understand their work in terms of their self-worth and their relationship to the music industries. As a Welsh folk singer, herself having played at Glastonbury and having numerous critical releases, said: "I meet someone and they say 'what's your job'?... There is that hesitation… and you think I better mention the other stuff I do because maybe it sounds more valid. Maybe it *is* more valid?" (Folk musician, Cardiff). Her answer itself is indicative, as even within her response, she questions the validity of her creative labour given its lack of financial value. Indeed, this lack of financial value can cause others to question the merit of what musicians do: "People's attitudes towards musicians are pretty shitty. They will ask 'are you still doing your little music thing'? Well, yes. Are you still doing your little banking thing?" (Dubstep producer, London).

Success, then, was often being able to call oneself a musician, with the idea of giving up music and thus no longer being a musician being profoundly disturbing despite all the difficulties they spoke of during the interviews. Not being a musician was tantamount to being deleted - a source of far greater anxiety than existing as a musician.

5.2.3 The Importance of Relationships

Family relationships

The strain of being a musician can have a deep effect on personal relationships and family life. Unsocial hours and time away spent recording, promoting a release or touring; all these things make maintaining relationships and family life difficult for musicians. A female DJ, who has been playing all over the world for over twenty years suggested that her musical career has effectively taken precedence over her desire for a relationship: "It has made it pretty impossible…to meet someone… I had to make a choice between my job, my work life and my family, and I chose work over my family" (DJ Paulette, Manchester).

They have to rely on the kindness, understanding and support of others. For those in relationships this was primarily their partners, but sometimes their parents too, and although all of those interviewed expressed their gratitude at having this support, they also spoke of the guilt they felt and how often this can engender feelings of worthlessness: "The stress of being away from home… And when you're really, really busy you hardly see the family, that's when marital problems start. I've had terrible experiences of stuff happening while I'm away from home… A lot of trying to get home as soon as possible…; latest flights out, earliest flights back…" (Jazz Musician, Birmingham).

Almost all of those interviewed had experienced difficulties in this area and often spoke about the loss of relationships and families in terms of sacrifice; a constant battle to prioritise their work or their relationships.

> "I know plenty of people who got so burned out after tours they became depressed and heard about relationships breaking up. It's not easy for those with partners and families unless they can bring them along but that's usually [only] the most successful/ famous people because they are the only ones who can afford it" - Soul/ Jazz Singer, Bristol

Musical relationships

The informality of music industry working relationships belies what is an intensely networked environment, in which who you know and where you are in relation to the power centers of the music business, mainly understood as London, is experienced as increasingly important despite the rhetoric of the digital media. The frustration of musicians with this ambiguous set up seems to lead again to further frustrations and anxieties. This is experienced acutely when contracts are lost and business relationships fail. As one artist told us: "All of the people I worked with I thought of as family… [in reality] it was just a façade. This industry has no friends" (R&B Singer/ Songwriter, London).

There were also concerns raised about the blurring of relationship boundaries, and the inability to distinguish 'friends', from 'colleagues'. Many of the interviewees spoke of their hurt and frustration: "You feel worthless. You are one musician amongst many. You don't matter." (Pop/ urban producer, London). Others spoke about their worlds falling apart and of everything they had worked for and relied on, and the personal networks around them, seemingly disappearing before their eyes:

> "...our whole infrastructure started to fall apart. So then our manager said - once the record deal fell through - 'I can't manage you anymore', our infrastructure just slowly dissipated. So pretty much all at once, we lost our deal, we lost our lawyer and we lost our manager and one band member! BUT we kept going…" - Singer/ songwriter, London.

5.2.4 Equality, Diversity and Safety in the Workplace

Matters of equality and diversity, sexual harassment and ageism in the entertainment world have dominated much of the media over the last couple of years, from the

hashtag #BritsSoWhite[6] to the legal challenges of Kesha versus Dr Luke[7]. Whilst the UK music industries are now speaking up and committing to be held to account on these matters, as evidenced in our findings these issues have long been widely ignored across the music sector and there remains much work to be done if things are to improve.

Musicians were very aware of the significance of one's age and appearance, and so, the passing of time is another cause of anxiety. It was notable that the female musicians recounted very troubling experiences and in one case an extremely alarming history of sexual abuse in the workplace. The ability to be able to go to work without being bullied, sexually harassed or abused ought to be paramount. However, it was clear from some of these interviews that abuses of power, from bullying to actual sexual abuse, were a feature of some of these women's working lives. This was echoed in the media with growing accounts about sexual abuse in music environments from female fans at gigs[8] to recording studios[9].

One of the interviewees spoke of having to be measured monthly by her record company and management so that she remained a size 8 in order to fit into 'sample sizes' of clothes. Another spoke of her own eating disorders and of starving herself before auditions: "When they asked me to go and rehearse with them, I didn't eat for a

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[6] Yomi Adegoke - *#BritsSoWhite: Why This Year's Nominees Need To Take A Stand.* The Guardian 24.02.16 https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/24/brits-so-white-why-this-years-nominees-need-to-take-a-stand (Last accessed 05.01.17)

[7] Maura Johnson - *Kesha and Dr. Luke: Everything You Need To Know To Understand The Case.* Rolling Stone 22.02.16 http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/kesha-and-dr-luke-everything-you-need-to-know-to-understand-the-case-20160222 (Last accessed 05.01.17)

[8] Thea de Gallier - *Why Have Gigs Become A Dangerous Place For Women?* Team Rock 20.10.15 http://teamrock.com/feature/2015-10-20/why-have-gigs-become-a-dangerous-place-for-women (Last accessed 05.01.17)

[9] Staff Writer, Thump News - *The Music Industry Has A Problem With Sexual Assault.* Vice 20.01.16 https://thump.vice.com/en_au/article/the-music-industry-has-a-problem-with-sexual-assault-here-are-11-stories-you-can-read-about-it (Last accessed 05.01.17)

week…. That's the first thing I think of when I get on stage: "why is that fat girl on stage?" (Indie/Musical Theatre, Belfast).

> **"Why am I going into this environment, which for women is so unsafe? And it really is. It really is. And it just kind of dawned on me that it does take a bit of a nutter to do this job – in terms of anxiety, it's the risk element"** - DJ Paulette, Manchester.

The musicians we spoke to felt that women were being discriminated against and at times abused in this environment; such behaviour requires urgent and expedient attention, as well as further research to understand the challenges faced by women working in the music industries.

6. Recommendations

"I think it is a real flag up actually that now everybody is aware of the problem [of mental health issues in the music business]. It would be really dreadful if we had lots of interested parties 'competing'. We need alliances. We need people working together for the greater good."
- Diane Wagg, Co-Chairperson Music Managers Forum

This research has illuminated some of the features of the music industries which the musicians we spoke to feel have a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. These features include profound precarity both in finances and experience, as well as damaging working conditions focusing primarily on their place in a feedback economy, difficulties in conceptualising success, the impact their career has on relationship formation and maintenance, and the role of equality and safety. The question now is, what can be done about this? In other words, from our interviews with musicians, music industry stakeholders, and existing mental health service providers, what are some practical steps which might be taken to try and help musicians in this potentially psychologically dangerous environment?

6.1 The Question of Control

One of the clearest messages we received from this research was that musicians and music industry stakeholders were extremely glad that someone was finally looking into this area and listening to their very real concerns and anxieties. In this sense, both this and further research are vital as the first steps towards seeking meaningful coping mechanisms for these debilitating and very real conditions, as after all, *understanding* is the first step towards problem solving. This was perhaps exemplified in our interviews with music managers concerning their duty of care towards musicians, and learning that they are often experiencing the same mental turmoil as their clients.

Managers by default aren't 'allowed' to have problems – they have to be the problem solvers. However, like artists, they are trying to manage their working environment and they too talk of taking control. Yet, control is the ultimate nebulous concept. Control matters, but in this precarious and blurred world of the music industries, control is as slippery as luck and just as hard to come by.

6.2 Access to Support

The issue of mental health provision is as complex an area as mental health illness itself. There are a wide range of highly specialised needs and service providers, and in most cases accessing help tended to start with either family or one's general practitioner (GP). Some of our interviewees actively wanted medication or even found being sectioned to have been helpful in their recovery in the end. This was particularly true for those who had suffered from conditions such as bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia. In this sense, one must not privilege one form of care (be it pharmacological) over another (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) as each and even combinations of treatments can be beneficial for sufferers, depending on their specific needs.

What our research has shown us, very clearly, is that the access to, and successes of, these services is, for musicians, precarious i.e. hugely reliant on a supportive inter-personal infrastructure. **Access to support is perceived of as precarious as the industry itself,** and there is sense in which help adheres to a kind of inequitable, 'Withnail and I' philosophy of 'free for those that can afford it; very expensive to those that can't'**.** Professional, affordable help, and access to that help, is needed. As our findings have shown, musicians forge their creative careers in a highly fragmented, hyper-competitive, over-supplied context of competing stakeholders within which it becomes near impossible to find a duty of care beyond management and professional relationships and where coping strategies are much needed.

The concept of duty of care is often reliant on being able to show a direct link between the harm and those who might be accountable, but in a world of blurred boundaries, blurred definitions and blurred relationships, **who is responsible is often very hard to identify or at least single out.** Likewise, the problems identified in this research are infrastructural problems that are understood by stakeholders from their own stakeholder perspectives; specifically, as in all walks of life, stakeholders tend to protect stakeholder interests. However, what this report has clearly demonstrated, is that music industries stakeholders need to come together in an effort to try and mitigate the worst excesses of the industries they all live and work within. As one musician told us: "There is no incentive to be kind" (Pop/ urban producer, London).

Given all of this, we make the following three recommendations…

Recommendation 1. Education is Key

Ensuring a greater awareness of the mental health challenges facing those working within the music industries is vital. This educational processes needs to take place on a variety of levels.

Firstly, within the plethora of music education courses, both within higher education and elsewhere, there needs to be a concerted effort to **embed mental health within the curriculum** of the courses on offer, to ensure that students are aware of the challenges they might face, and so that they might take appropriate preparatory steps. This is our responsibility as educators. There is no 'Health and Safety Manual' for the music industries, but we do a fundamental disservice to our young people if we do not openly acknowledge the potentially dangerous environment within which they seek to forge their careers.

Secondly, this educational process needs to expand beyond the classrooms and lecture theatres, and needs to be shared within and by the institutions of the music industries. Certainty, this awareness is growing all the time:

> **"I think everyone is now talking about depression in the music industries. It is a real thing. The dangers of the performing world have always been there. The highs are very high and then there is a kind of built in obsolescence that means the lows are very, very low."**
> – Neil Barnes, Leftfield

In this sense, we must share findings such as those contained within this report and others in this newly emerging area, in order to stimulate a conversation within the music industries about the dangers those working within it face. It is by engendering this open dialogue that we can seek to achieve our second recommendation…

Recommendation 2. A Code of Best Practice

Taking the lead on producing a Code of Best Practice that individuals or organisations working in the music industries could sign up to might be a highly effective way of asserting a new vision to improve working conditions across the music sector for the benefit of all those who live and work within it. For example, a Code of Best Practice could be used to signpost best practice from touring practices in the live music industry to include safe spaces for those working at night, drinking provision on contract riders and so-on.

There are several very good examples of these 'accountability agreements' emanating from new music spaces being run by self-governing groups – DIY Space for London being a good example. Understanding amongst all stakeholders in this highly fractured environment is key but cannot be assumed; it is better to take the lead and see who will follow. Although a degree of 'joined up thinking' is required in order to communicate with the range of varying stakeholders within the music industries about the very real problems facing musicians, there genuinely seems to be a lot of good will around to try and improve the situation.

Our recommendation proposes that such a code would act akin to a scheme like the London Living Wage in that it would be not compulsory, but would act as a voluntary demonstration of organisations' commitment to awareness of the problem and an inter-personal commitment to kindness, tolerance, and understanding of the challenges faced by creative workers e.g. committing to pay invoices within 14 days, for instance.

Recommendation 3. Specialist Mental Health Support Services

The importance of professional help and a support service that understands the specific and unique issues facing musicians was also raised in our interviews. It was clear from all those we interviewed that talking to people that understand the aspirations and challenges of being a musician is very important. All felt that it was difficult to talk to people that had no understanding of the music business because their experience was that they could be unsympathetic or even dismissive. It was also clear that they felt they needed a service that was easier to access than current mental health service provision. In short, they want professional qualified help.

From talking to musicians that had benefitted from being a part of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, these sharing and acknowledging experiences are powerful and helpful to many. This could be what music workers need - a forum of artists who *get it* –something like Musicians Anonymous. The detail as to how this forum might work is not elucidated herein, but it was clear that musicians wanted to talk to musicians. However, people need varying and complementary services and the right access to those services; in other words, the right care for the right problem. In this sense, the recommendations we have made herein should be incorporated as only one possible treatment mechanism within a range of services that currently exist. There will never be a 'one size fits all' treatment programme, nor can any one treatment necessarily act as a panacea.

7. Conclusions

The findings highlighted in this report concern the deleterious impact on musicians' mental health of seeking to create a career from music. As one interviewee said: "There's something to be said for people who make music for a hobby because they're not controlled by 'the industry' in that way." (Indie/Musical Theatre, Belfast).

The fact that artists love what they do should not mean that they are left to fend for themselves within the parameters of a working environment which, as this research has shown, can be cruel, exploitative and often, unpleasant: "the creatives are vulnerable because it's a passion… It's a very unprotected industry" (Producer/ Songwriter, London). It means that a great deal of the exploitation that occurs is, unfortunately, self-exploitation because these workers love the work they do and it has become seen as part of the music economy that musicians should, for example, work for free, reinforcing the idea that musical work is somehow outside an economic definition of work.

The very real concerns, expressed by musicians themselves, of the impact their working conditions have on their mental heath can no longer be ignored. As we have seen in the fashion industry the issue of body image and its potential negative health impacts have been taken seriously, and it is now widely accepted that pressures on models can contribute towards serious psychological disorders such as anorexia or body dysmorphia. So now, no one would suggest that models might, for instance, just like being looked at wearing clothes and just might be extremely vain, thus making them more susceptible to conditions surrounding their perception of how they look. To do so would be insulting and ignorant, willfully disregarding the profound impact the structural features of the fashion industry can have on those at its heart. This research must be the first step in making similar acknowledgements about musicians and the music industries.

Some musicians might well be introspective, and they may be more attuned to matters of mental health than the general public, although the issues here are too complex and too intertwined to make such simple diagnosis. Likewise, some musicians may be attracted to writing music due to the existence of some inner trauma. However, what these research findings are clearly indicating, and the aforementioned Australian research findings similarly concur, is that not only are musicians more likely to be depressed or anxious than members of the general public, but that the specific characteristics of a musical career itself - namely financial and experiential precarity, alongside damaging cultural norms and working conditions - is at least a contributory factor of their mental ill health.

Certainly, none of these features of a career in music are necessarily unique to music. Many careers have stressors. However, it is the combination of the factors outlined in this report, and the way in which musicians feel about these factors, that are potentially perilous. These factors attack workers, like a virus. Not only that, but because of the way musicians *are* their work - it is their core identity - and the way they have to entrepreneurially believe in both themselves and how the industry 'works', they come to embody these ideas. We would argue this renders them particularly vulnerable.

In writing this report, which sought to both speak to industry and make recommendations, we came to realise that the central characteristic that defines the relationship between being a musician and such high incidences of mental ill health, is that of precarity – in all its forms. It is therefore vital that a more rigorous exploration of the concept of precarity, based on the findings of our research, is presented. It is this work that we will next be publishing in order to more fundamentally extend our understanding of precarity, and the role it plays in the lives of artists. We look forward to publishing this work in the coming months.

8. Report Details

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Musicians Interviewed and their Demographics

number	occupation	genre	age	gender	location
1	Musician	Pop/ Soul	31	M	London
2	Singer/ Songwriter	Pop	34	F	London
3	Musician	Jazz/ Soul	29	F	London
4	Performer/ Producer	Urban	54	M	Manchester
5	Musician	Jazz	50	M	Birmingham
6	Musician	Indie/ Theatre	34	F	Belfast
7	Musician	Jazz	30	F	London
8	DJ	Dance	50	F	Manchester
9	Songwriter	Reggae/ Soul	59	F	Manchester
10	Singer/ Songwriter	Soul/ Jazz/ Dance	49	F	Bristol
11	Musician	Classical	34	F	London
12	Songwriter	Pop	22	F	London
13	Musician	Rock	24	M	London
14	Musician	Rock	24	M	Newcastle
15	Musician	Dance	50	M	London
16	Musician	Folk	23	M	Glasgow
17	Musician	Classical	30	F	Birmingham
18	Producer	Dubstep	25	M	London
19	Producer/ Songwriter	Pop	34	M	London
20	Producer	Dance	32	M	London
21	Musician	Classical	28	F	Cardiff
22	Singer	Urban	28	F	London
23	Singer	Opera	32	F	London
24	Singer/ Songwriter	Singer-songwriter	28	M	Bristol
25	Musician/ Educator	Jazz/ Pop/ Rock	26	M	Edinburgh
26	Musical Director	Musical Theatre	25	M	Newcastle

Appendix 2: Demographic Summaries

occupation	no.		genre	no.		location	no.		gender	no.
Musician	10		Classical	3		London	14		M	13
Songwriter	2		Jazz	2		Manchester	3		F	13
Singer/ Songwriter	3		Jazz/ soul	1		Bristol	2			
Musician/ Songwriter/ Producer	1		Jazz/ pop/ rock	1		Birmingham	2			
DJ	2		Pop	3		Edinburgh	1			
Performer/ producer	1		Pop/ soul	1		Belfast	1			
Producer	2		Rock	2		Cardiff	1			
Producer/ Songwriter	1		Folk	1		Glasgow	1			
Singer	2		Dance	3		Edinburgh	1			
Musician/ Educator	1		Dubstep	1						
DJ	1		Indie/ Theatre	1						
			Musical Theatre	1						
			Reggae/ soul	1						
			Soul/ Jazz/ Dance	1						
			Opera	1						
			Singer/ Songwriter	1						
			Urban	2						
totals	**26**			**26**			**26**			**26**

Appendix 3. Questions Asked of Musicians

1	Can you say what you do? What area of music do you work in?
2	Can you describe your current living situation?
3	What percentage does music income contribute to your monthly income?
4	Have you ever suffered from anxiety or depression or any other mental illness – can you talk about your experience?
5	Can you describe your relationship to the wider music industry – for example to managers, record labels, live performance
6	What is your relationship to social media?
7	What are the worst things about your work?
8	What are the best things about your work?

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Appendix 4. Themes Arising from Interviews

This table shows the number of musicians interviewed (26) who have experienced any of the conditions set-out below. This list is not a prescribed list of conditions, but those mentioned by the interviewees themselves.

condition	tally of interviewees
Anxiety	18
Artistic vulnerability	1
Body image	4
Burnout/ exhaustion	11
Competition	13
Depression	4
Failure	2
Financial insecurity	16
Isolation	3
Lack of creative freedom	2
Lack of recognition	3
Loss of control (artistically)	6
Loss of control (business-wise)	3
Meeting expectations	10
Panic	1
Panic attacks	2
Peer pressure	6
Performance anxiety	4
Personal health	1
Personal relationship pressure	8
Pressure to deliver	12
Regularity/ stability of work	8
Rejection	6
Self-confidence/ self esteem	6
Self-doubt	10
Sexism	5
Sexual assault	1
Sexual harassment	1
Stress	4
Uncertainty	4
Work insecurity	1
Work-life balance	3

Appendix 5: Interviews with Mental Health Professionals

The following experts in mental health were interviewed as part of this research project. Some requested anonymity, others were happy to be identified.

Companies and individuals offering bespoke therapies for musicians and people working in the music industries:

1. Paul Crick - The Performance Confidence Coach For Musicians

2. Angie Lester and Peter Challis - Prolific; specialists in working with creative people in crisis.

3. Chris Madden - A qualified psychotherapist/ counselor, specialising in the music industries. Currently works in Higher Education at Leeds University and the Backstage Academy as well as having a private practice.

4. Dr. Gary Bradley, musician and coaching psychologist, Northern Ireland.

Anonymous

1. An off-the-record conversation with a Doctor of Psychoanalysis at The Tavistock Clinic about psychoanalysis, CBT and other short term 'talking' therapies.

2. A mental health social worker for Hackney Council, qualified to section people and who is very experienced with medication in mental health.

3. A Narcotics Anonymous leader about Narcotics Anonymous and Alcholics Anonymous.

4. Three individuals undergoing therapy with Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Unavailable

1. An interview request with The Priory Clinic was declined due to time pressures.