

Professional musicians in the UK

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEY

Help Musicians UK is the leading UK charity for professional musicians of all genres, from starting out through to retirement. We help emerging professionals to develop their talent, working musicians who hit a crisis in their lives such as an illness or accident and musicians in retirement.

As part of researching and developing modern interventions for musicians, particularly in the area of Health and Wellbeing, we recently carried out an online survey with musicians from all genres and at all stages in their careers to learn more about the stresses and strains of the profession.

The survey results provide us with a broad snapshot of some of the key areas affecting musicians today which we will use as the basis for more detailed research to inform how we shape new and existing services.

Survey sample

552 musicians responded, representing a broad range of professional musical activity across the UK. 54% of respondents were women and 46% men. 59% worked in classical music and 21% were orchestral musicians. Jazz and folk musicians were strongly represented, together with a range of other genres including pop, musical theatre, world, indie/alternative and rock/metal.

Table 1: 'What is your main instrument'

44 instruments featured, the 8 most common being

Main instrument	Number of respondents
Voice	110
Violin	57
Guitar	48
Piano	46
Viola	30
Cello	28
Drums/Percussion	21
Bass	20

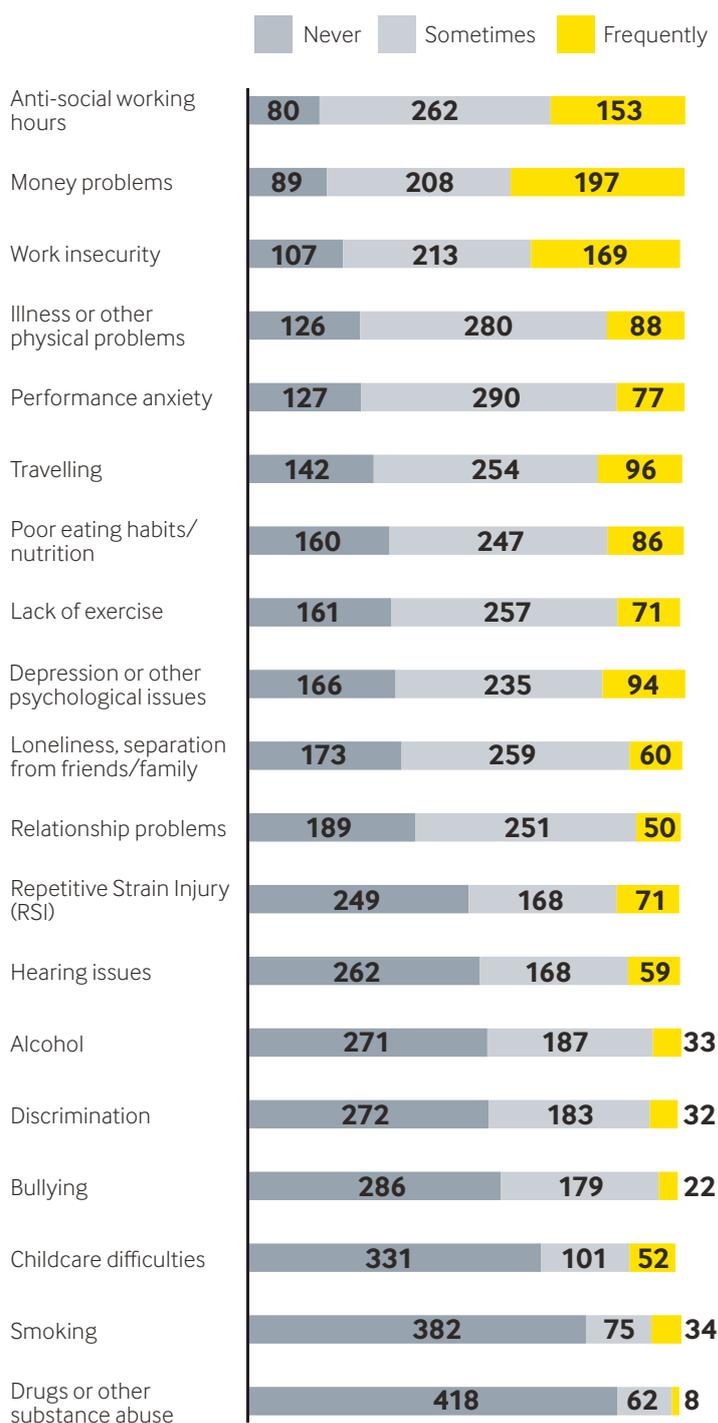
Table 2: 'How many years have you been working as a professional musician?'

Fewer than 5	18%
5 - 10	23%
11 - 15	12%
16 - 20	10%
21 - 30	18%
30+	19%

Health and wellbeing concerns of musicians

We identified a range of issues commonly highlighted by working musicians and asked survey respondents which ones applied to them and how frequently.

Chart 1: How often in your life as a musician have you experienced these problems?



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The highest concern expressed was anti-social working hours (84%). With performances often happening in the evening, frequently involving travel away from home and a largely freelance lifestyle, these can impact significantly on a musician's health and wellbeing. It's perhaps not surprising then that depression, loneliness and relationship difficulties also feature high on the list.

"Telling people about problems you're having means admitting you're less than perfect which is what we're striving for in performance"

Money problems (82%) and work insecurity (79%) were top concerns. This underlines the findings of the 2012 Musicians' Union (MU) 'Working Musicians' report which revealed that 56% of the 2,000 musicians

surveyed earned less than £20,000 a year and only 35% could afford to pay into a pension scheme.

Performance related health issues

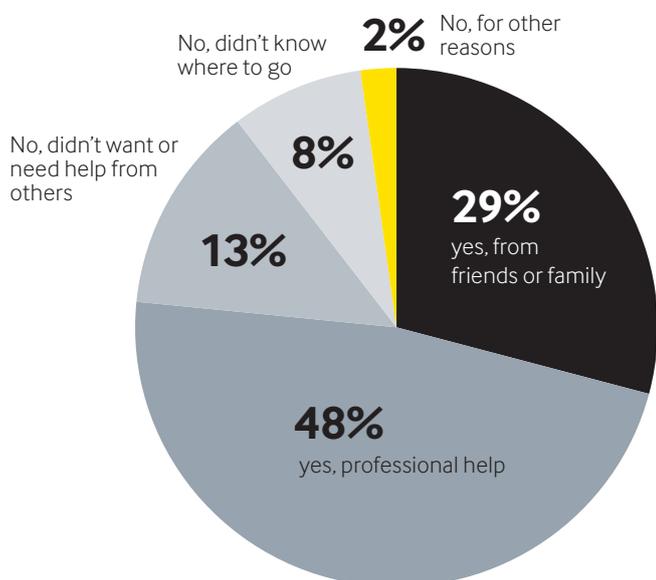
Other striking results for a profession where the expectation is that musicians perform consistently at the highest level is that 75% of those who responded had experienced performance anxiety, 48% had experienced a RSI (repetitive strain injury) at some point in their career and 47% reported hearing problems. All of these have a serious impact on a musician's ability to work and earn.

75% OF RESPONDENTS HAD EXPERIENCED PERFORMANCE ANXIETY AT SOME POINT

Seeking help

Fewer than half the respondents had sought professional help with problems, though the support of friends and family was important. When asked where they'd gone to find help, the single biggest response (171) was to private medical practitioners. This is surprising considering money problems and work insecurity are of obvious concern to musicians.

Chart 2: 'Did you seek help?'

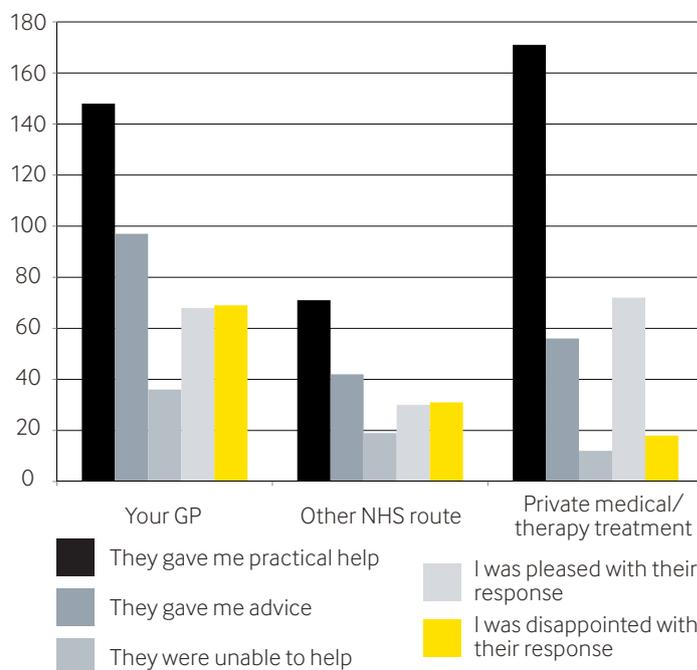


Musicians who had chosen private treatment were very positive about the help they received. Of those who had consulted the NHS, almost half said they had been disappointed with the response.

"I feel guilty asking for help with something I should be able to deal with given the issues in question are part and parcel of the career path I've chosen"

This suggests that the NHS may not be well equipped to deal with performance related health problems although this and the reasons why musicians resort to private health care needs more detailed research.

Chart 3: 'Who did you approach for help? And how pleased were you with the help offered'



48% OF MUSICIANS RESPONDING HAD SUFFERED A REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Conclusions and solutions

It's clear that for all its rewards, the lifestyle of a professional musician can carry with it a number of challenges to health and wellbeing.

"It's difficult to find specific help from professionals familiar enough with the life of a musician. That's what I need"

At Help Musicians UK we will be actively developing our own services and working with partners to provide professional musicians with the specialist support they need. We want musicians to enjoy full, active, healthy careers and achieve their potential so we can all continue to enjoy a thriving musical culture in the UK.

For more information contact info@helpmusicians.org.uk
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