

# Undergraduate music students' characteristics of music performance anxiety: a systematic review

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## Background

Music performance anxiety (MPA) is identified as a persistent apprehension that compromises performative competences in public (solo or group performances), affecting both instrumentalists and singers (Brodsky, 1996; Ryan & Andrews, 2009; Salmon, 1990). As stated by Kenny (2011; 2016), symptoms include a set of cognitive (feelings of fear, tension, panic, negative thoughts), behavioural (withdrawn posture, technical failures, tremors) and physiological responses (hyperventilation, salivation, accelerated heartbeat, gastrointestinal problems, excessive adrenaline and cortisol release). These symptoms have been observed to appear before, during and after a music performance (Papageorgi et al., 2007), and can have a negative impact not only on the performer's career, but also on personal wellbeing and health.

## Aims

This systematic review aims to provide an overview of research articles addressing the characteristics of MPA as experienced by undergraduate music students. It implemented the PRISMA statement protocol in order to acquire data through search algorithms in the databases Web of Science, PubMed, Scopus and Eric. Of 1526 articles found through the keywords searched, 43 were identified as relevant, and selected for review.

## Main Contribution

The research published in these articles present highly variable prevalence rates of MPA, from 16% to 83.1% among music students attending higher education, and identified problems such as somatic anxiety, performance-related concerns and stress, fear and stage apprehension, negative thoughts and disturbing concerns, low self-confidence, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, lack of optimism, shame, punishment, panic, perfectionism, low perceived social support, need for approval, depression, dysfunctional attitudes, music progress impatience, pre-performance nervousness, burnout, and the pertinence of gender and institutional culture.

## Implications

This review, in addition to providing us with an update of the literature in this area, confirms that MPA has negative consequences for professional musicians, with a reported prevalence ranging from 16% to 60% (Fernholz et al., 2019). These findings indicate that the lack of institutional support can trigger career abandonment or occupational health problems, suggesting that there is an urgent need for clinical and psychological interventions.

Thus, we recommend the implementation of contents and protocols in music teaching programs addressing coping strategies, cognitive-based interventions directed to the experienced types of anxiety and psychological interventions to promote wellbeing, musicians' health, control and self-regulation of MPA. Furthermore, teaching practices should favour an environment of safety, tranquillity, and trust in the teacher-student relationship, enabling the student to feel at ease with mistakes and difficulties, and understanding these as a part of the learning process. Further longitudinal and qualitative research should promote a more ecological approach to music performance anxiety.

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