

Fame is more likely to kill rock stars, not being 27 years old

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The list of well known musicians who have died at age 27 may look like more than a coincidence – Amy Winehouse, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain, and Brian Jones to name a few – but their age is unlikely to have been the cause of their demise, according to research in the Christmas issue published in the *British Medical Journal* today.

While fame may increase the risk of death for musicians, probably due to their rock and roll lifestyle, this risk is not limited to [age](#) 27, say the authors led by Adrian Barnett from Queensland University of Technology in Australia.

To test the "27 club" hypothesis, the authors compared the mortality of famous musicians with that of the UK population. They included 1,046 musicians (solo artists and band members) who had a number one album in the UK charts between 1956 and 2007.

During this period 71 (7%) of the musicians died.

The sample included crooners, death metal stars, rock 'n' rollers and even Muppets (the actors, not the puppets). The total follow-up time was 21,750 musician years.

The authors used mathematical analysis to determine the significance of age 27. They found no peak in the risk of death at this age, however musicians in their 20s and 30s were two to three times more likely to die

prematurely than the general UK population.

The research team found some evidence of a cluster of deaths in those aged 20 to 40 in the 1970s and early 1980s. Interestingly, there were no deaths in this age group in the late 1980s and the authors speculate that this could be due to better treatments for heroin overdose, or the change in the music scene from the hard rock 1970s to the pop dominated 1980s.

The authors conclude that the "27 club" is based on myth, but warn that musicians have a generally increased risk of dying throughout their 20s and 30s. They say: "This finding should be of international concern, as [musicians](#) contribute greatly to populations' quality of life, so there is immense value in keeping them alive (and working) as long as possible."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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