

# Work, money worries leave many musicians singing the blues

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Credit: Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin

Researchers from Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin, in collaboration with the mental health-focused SIMS Foundation, have identified work and financial stress as risk factors that

may increase clinical depression and anxiety among musicians, according to new study findings presented at the 36th Annual Performing Arts Medicine Association International Symposium in Orange, California.

A team led by Dell Med psychologist Lloyd Berg, Ph.D., analyzed survey results of 317 musicians in Austin, the "Live Music Capital of the World." The musicians were from nonclassical genres including blues, rock, country, hip hop, folk and world beat and had received [mental health](#) services from SIMS during the previous two years. They answered questions about levels of job-related stress, financial worries, depression, anxiety and alcohol misuse. The study showed that compared with people who have lower levels of stress:

- Musicians with higher levels of work-related stress were more than twice as likely to have significant levels of depression and anxiety, even when money concerns were accounted for.
- Musicians with higher levels of job insecurity were more than five times as likely to be depressed and six times as likely to suffer from anxiety.
- Musicians with higher levels of stress related to work relationships were more than 1.5 times as likely to report alcohol abuse.

This new study takes a deeper dive into specific factors affecting musicians' [mental health issues](#), adding to previous research showing that these entertainers are two to three times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety compared to the general population and three times more likely to commit suicide.

"Musicians are often portrayed in the media as 'tortured artists' who intentionally embrace emotional suffering as a source of creative inspiration – or their lifestyles are glamorized as being untroubled and

self-indulgent," said Berg, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Dell Med.

"But the truth is they struggle with lots of job stressors including unpredictable work opportunities, low wages and juggling multiple jobs just to survive," said Berg, who is also a [musician](#).

In the study, job insecurity included concerns related to being better known or better paid, lack of work and inadequate recognition of talent or success. Situations related to work relationship stress included conflicts with others in the [music industry](#), worries about colleagues appearing at performances on time and having to fire another musician.

## **Building Awareness of Musicians' Unrecognized Needs**

This new research adds to a rather limited body of study dedicated to musicians' mental health, an area that needs more focus from behavioral health professionals, Berg said.

"The results of this study put the tortured artist myth to bed, and hopefully directs musicians to address their mental health with interventions that address the unique stressors musicians face," said Heather Alden, executive director of the SIMS Foundation, an Austin-based mental health organization that gives musicians and music industry professionals low- or no-cost treatment from providers who understand musicians' unique stressors.

A 2018 national survey of more than 1,200 working musicians conducted by the Music Industry Research Association showed that more than 61 percent said their earnings from music performance were not enough to make ends meet.

Austin musicians share a similarly dire financial situation. More than two-thirds of Austin musicians surveyed reported "high" or "overwhelming" [financial stress](#), and only 25 percent said they were satisfied in their music careers.

## **The Good News for Musicians' Mental Health**

Even though the links between musician life and depression or anxiety paint a relatively negative picture for music makers, there are some upsides to work-related emotional strain.

For example, higher levels of touring-related stress – such as from having to play after a long road trip or feeling lonely or bored while on tour – was associated with decreased levels of anxiety and depression symptoms in more financially stressed musicians. Berg suggests that's because being on tour makes them feel like their careers are advancing.

Also, increased levels of performance-related [stress](#) – including auditioning, performing live music as a session player and coping with the effects of loud amplified music – were associated with a lower likelihood of alcohol misuse.

"The other good news from our own [previous research](#) is that contemporary musicians say when they do get mental health care from a provider familiar with health issues specific to musician life, they find the treatment to be satisfying and beneficial," said Berg.

A greater emphasis on healthy approaches to work and building emotional resilience can help musicians keep on jamming.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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