Understanding the needs of Singapore’s tertiary music students in health prevention: A preliminary study

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Objectives
Musicians require physical conditioning and preparation to perform at their best, and they can develop physical and mental problems as a result of their playing. Health prevention efforts in western countries have been focussing on educating tertiary music students on healthy playing and recognising warning signs for early intervention, in hopes of nurturing healthier professional musicians from an early stage. However, such efforts are not seen in Singapore’s music institutions. This study aims to explore the views of music students in Singapore on health and well-being, while identifying factors that could enable or discourage them from adopting healthier behaviours.

Methods
An open-ended questionnaire was distributed online to students and alumni of Singapore’s two main tertiary music institutions, in March 2019. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, and later via snowballing method. Inclusion criteria for participation were: current student or graduate of a local tertiary music institution and majoring in music performance in classical instrument(s).

The questionnaire included questions on demographics; motivations for pursuing music; general awareness of health issues related to music-playing; attitudes towards health and well-being; possible ways to encourage healthy behaviours among music students; and factors to consider when planning health promotion programmes for music students.

Fourteen participants responded to the questionnaire, and informed consent was obtained. The responses were then analysed using thematic analysis to generate themes that offer insight to the research questions.

This research was approved after being reviewed by Waseda University’s Ethics Review Committee on Human Research. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Results
The fourteen participants who responded to the questionnaire were aged 23-29; 6 of them played woodwind instruments; 7 played brass instruments; and 1 was a percussionist. 12 participants have graduated from their respective music institutions, while 2 were current students.

Subthemes that emerged with regards to the participants’ views on health and well-being include “awareness through personal experiences” and “time pressure”; while health issues that musicians faced were identified to be “physically-related”, “lifestyle-related” and “mentally-related”.

On the factors that encourage music students to adopt healthier behaviours, subthemes such as “maintaining physical and emotional well-being”, “performance quality”, “supportive peers”, “school system”, and “professional support” emerged.

For factors that deter music students from adopting healthy behaviours, subthemes such as “time commitment”, “accessibility”, and “suitability of information” were identified.

Discussion
This research study was carried out to investigate the views of Singapore’s tertiary music students on health and well-being, in order to gain insight on ways to promote healthy behaviours among this population.

Thematic qualitative analysis of the responses identified issues such as gaining awareness through personal experiences, which supports the need to involve this population in health prevention programmes early, so as to minimise their risks of experiencing playing-related health problems. Time pressure also emerged as a major issue as the participants reported to tend to dismiss health issues, or be discouraged from learning more about healthy behaviours due to time constraints and unwillingness to affect their musical studies.

Results from the current study suggests that when planning strategies for health promotion and prevention among this population, factors such as accessibility, time commitment, applicability, and tailoring to different students’ needs should be considered. Whilst studies investigating the efficacy of school curricula for musician’s health have been reported, this study suggests that approaches which complement such programmes might be essential to enhance health promotion and prevention efforts among music students.

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