Perceptions of playing-related musculoskeletal disorders (PRMDs) in Irish traditional musicians. A focus group study


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Playing-related musculoskeletal disorders in Irish traditional musicians: a focus group study

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1 Background

Between 32% and 87% of musicians have playing-related musculoskeletal problems (PRMDs)

Most research has investigated PRMDs in classical musicians

Conflict in the literature (classical vs folk):

- There are similar patterns of injury when comparing classical and folk musicians [1]
- Previous work found differences between classical and folk [2] and PRMDs [3] in Irish traditional musicians
- There has been very little research into Irish traditional musicians

To date:
- The pattern of injuries for classical musicians is different to those who play traditional music [2]
- PRMDs are a significant problem and can cause neurological abnormalities [3]
- PRMDs are a problem for traditional Irish musicians who have a culture of silence and isolation [3]

This is the first study to explore the Irish traditional musician’s perceptions of PRMDs

PRMDs: where they were...

- Wrist:
  - n = 3
  - These were mainly classical musicians

Fear: sub-theme disturbance of health professionals

Several participants commented on the lack of specialist knowledge of health professionals

Participants believe:
- Health professionals do not understand the unique needs of a musician, and especially
- Traditional musicians will tell them to stop playing
- An intervention could do more harm than good
- There are no clearly identified health professionals that specialise in PRMDs
- There is a lack of support for musicians with PRMDs

Fear: sub-theme the lack of a musician...

All participants believed there was a link between playing music and musculoskeletal problems

Although problems are commonplace, traditional musicians do not treat PRMDs seriously

“Breathe in, take a long and think about what it is, there's a block there where you know that - you know you're going to something then you might fall to stop playing for 2 or 3 months, and you probably would have been playing professionally a lot of times and you couldn't afford to do that because they're skilled at playing or because of their self-care.”

Only 5 of the 22 participants did not currently have a PRMD

PRMDs were considered less important than the music and the whole musical experience

Results

Participants: (n = 22)
- Students
- Teachers
- Performers
- University lecturer

-From Ireland (n = 16), Newtownards (n = 2), Sweden (n = 2), Shetland Islands (n = 1),
  Glasgow (n = 1)

Played: 5 to 40 years

Management of PRMDs in Irish traditional musicians

Fear: sub-theme avoidance

“I think there is this massive fear of having to give it up, and you might think about what it is, there’s a block there where you know that - you know you're going to something that it might fall to you to stop playing for 2 or 4 months, and you probably would have been playing professionally a lot of times and you actually couldn't do that because they're skilled at playing or because of their self-care.”

“You're just sitting in weird positions and in weird chairs”

Postural issues
- Postural problems are recognised, but not acted upon during the session
- Some musicians found the Alexander technique very useful
- Identity of being an Irish traditional musician does not include warm-ups and other exercises

The instrument
- Quality and physical size of the instrument was relevant to PRMDs
- Lesser quality and heavier instruments were more likely to cause PRMDs

Musicians alter their instruments to reduce PRMDs

The way music is taught
Traditional music is taught differently to classical features that relate to PRMDs are:
- Class sizes (classical is often 1:1, traditional can be up to 30 students)
- Coping the teacher’s posture and technique
- Lack of emphasis on posture when learning, and the difficulty of teaching this in a large class
- Many musicians are self-taught
- Little agreement on the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to play an instrument
- Pressure for students to leave the lesson having learned a tune (classical musicians may work on one piece for weeks)

“[Teacher] just said ‘just put the fiddle up there – that’s where your bow, work away’”

(The participant)

The way music is taught

“Tense, nervous, требуется and insufficient resolution of pain

‘...and I can just stop’. The lived experience of pain in Irish traditional musicians

Stresses contributing to PRMDs

Emotional/Psychological
- Higher risk of PRMDs if musician is:
  - Nervous
  - Amoeba
  - Tense
  - Stressed

Management includes trying to relax

Discussion

In order to be successful, musicians must have:
- Physical and mental strength
- Endurance
- Manual dexterity
- Bodily coordination
- Ability to play repetitively and rapidly, day after day, and year after year [5, 6]

A successful musician and a successful athlete, will each have these same qualities.

Stress contributing to PRMDs

Physical
- Setting is designed for performance (often pubs, bars)
- Playing often happens at night, and can last for several hours (especially sessions)
- Although the setting may be unsuitable, there is a reluctance to discuss the session or draw attention to themselves and this away from the music by asking for more music or bringing the issue to everyone’s attention

“You would be sat in a corner of a pub and you do find that it is strenuous across the back”

(Postural Participant 11)

Postural issues
- Postural problems are recognised, but not acted upon during the session
- Some musicians found the Alexander technique very useful
- Identity of being an Irish traditional musician does not include warm-ups and other exercises

Because if you say ‘this is injury prevention for musicians’ people would laugh at you.”

(Postural Participant 2)

Stress

- Financial problems
- Impaired playing
- Disability
- Pain

Discussion

All participants either had one or more PRMD or knew of someone with a PRMD

Irish traditional musicians consider themselves, their music and their musical culture as different to other musicians e.g. classical

Despite being aware of problems such as seeing a specialist, etc., participating in music was more important than their pain and discomfort

WHY?

Because being a musician requires dedication, desire and discipline [8], and encompasses a sense of identity, a place in the musical community as well as an income and way of life.

Take home messages

Irish traditional musicians identified specific issues and stresses within their culture that were associated with PRMDs

Not all musicians are the same – there are different musical cultures as well as different music and playing environments

Health professionals must understand the musculoskeletal and performance demands of each musician, in order to provide help

References


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