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Perceived Stress in Undergraduate Instrumental Music Majors

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Stress and job satisfaction are commonly cited influences related to music educator attrition and job changes (Gardner, 2010; Hamann, 1990; Hamann et al., 1987; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Hancock, 2016; McLain, 2005; Scheib, 2003, 2004, 2006). Hamann (1990) suggested music teachers likely bring this stress upon themselves: “because they are so eager and willing to give constantly of themselves, they are highly prone to burnout” (p. 33). Similar levels of dedication have been found in college-level musicians (Bernhard, 2005; Castro, 2016; Dews & Williams, 1989; Orzel, 2010). Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine what factors may influence stress levels among college music majors.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived stress levels of undergraduate wind and percussion music majors at a large Midwestern university. Research questions included: (a) What is the reported stress level of undergraduate wind and percussion music majors? (b) Is there a relationship between the number of hours devoted to music practice, ensemble rehearsals, other homework, or outside jobs and reported stress levels? (c) What is the relationship between the type of music degree program enrollment and reported stress levels of undergraduate music majors? and (d) What is the relationship between year in the degree program and perceived stress?

A one-time online survey was administered to wind and percussion majors ($N = 66$) to collect demographic information and stress levels as measured by the ten question *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)* (Cohen et al., 1994). Results indicated that music majors in this study reported higher than average stress levels. A strong positive correlation was found between the total perceived stress and the hours devoted to homework. There was no significant relationship between either music degree program or year in the degree program and to the total perceived stress of the participants. Implications and future research will be discussed.

Applications to Teaching:

- Music Major stress may be higher than “normal” peer stress levels.
- The amount of homework time could be a primary contributor to higher stress levels.
- Music Majors need more strategies for managing stress levels.

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