



Are the Music Performance Anxiety Symptoms of Performing Artists Students and Professionals Influenced by the Realities of the Portuguese Artistic Sector?

A Pilot Study

BMPF7008 – Work Based Learning Project

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Introduction: Are MPA and labor precarity in Portugal's artistic sector connected?

- Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is a widespread phenomenon affecting musicians and performer globally (Steptoe & Fidler 1987; Kenny, 2011).
- MPA can affect artistic performance, wellbeing, and long-term career sustainability (Steptoe & Fidler, 1987; Oliveira, 2009; Kenny, 2011; Damas, 2017;).
- Portuguese performers face unique structural precarity (Conde, 2009; Guardão, 2018; Ermida & Pratas-Cruzeiro, 2024).
- This study explores how MPA and precarity interact

Context: The Portuguese Artistic Sector

Chronic Precarity

The Portuguese artistic sector is characterised by persistent structural instability and insecure working conditions (Oliveira, 2019; Borges & Veloso, 2020; Campanela, 2023).

Mental Health Impact

Structural pressures significantly undermine mental health and wellbeing (Conde, 2009; Oliveira, Hrvatin et al. , 2021; Campanela, 2023).

Research Gap

The connection between labour precarity and MPA has never been empirically examined in Portugal.



Research Aims

01

Identify MPA Symptoms

To identify common symptoms and lived experiences of music performance anxiety amongst Portuguese performing artists and students.

02

Understand Precarity Navigation

To understand how performers perceive and navigate precarious conditions within the artistic labour market.

03

Explore the link between MPA and Precarity

To explore whether precarious working conditions might relate to higher levels of performance anxiety.



Literature Review (Part 1): MPA Symptoms

MPA encompasses cognitive, emotional, and somatic symptoms that manifest before, during, and after performances (Kenny, 2011).

- **High prevalence amongst students and young professionals** (Barros et al., 2022; Henshaw & Collyer, 2022)
- **Affects wellbeing and performance quality** (Steptoe, 2001; Hildebrandt et al., 2012; Kenny 2011).
- **Threatens long-term career sustainability** (Nagel 2009; Kenny, 2011; Barros et al., 2022).
- **Can lead to avoidance behaviours and career abandonment** (Nagel, 2009; Studer et al., 2011)



Literature Review (Part 2): Precarity in Portuguese Arts

→ Unstable Income

Portuguese artists face fragmented labour markets with inconsistent income streams and limited financial security (Conde, 2009; Guardão, 2018; Campanela, 2023; Ermida & Pratas-Cruzeiro, 2024)

→ Informal Networks

Success often depends on gatekeeping practices, personal connections (Conde, 2009; Oliveira, 2019), and the 'recibos verdes' freelance system (Campanela, 2023).

→ Psychological Toll

Precarity contributes to chronic stress, burnout, exhaustion, and identity strain amongst cultural workers (Oliveira 2019, Hrvatin et al. , 2021; Campanela, 2023).

Literature Review: Critical Gaps



Missing Link

No studies have examined the relationship between MPA and Portuguese labor precarity.



Structural Contributors

Limited exploration of how structural conditions contribute to performance anxiety.



Support Gaps

Scarce implementation of psychological support within arts education and professional settings.

Paradigm: Why Mixed Methods?

Pragmatic Approach

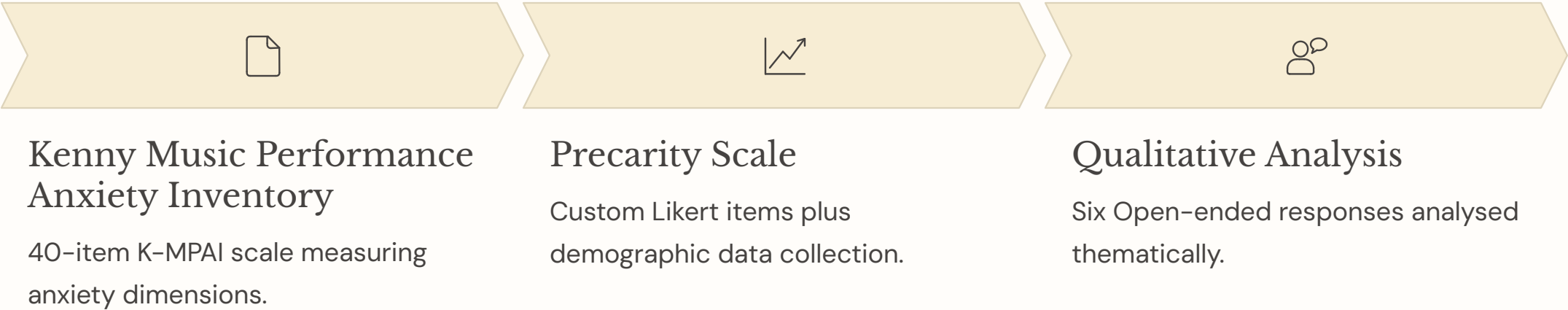
Mixed-Methods Approach : Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Mixed-methods are particularly suitable for studying “complex systems involving human behaviour, emotions, and social conditions” (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2021).

Mixed methods allow the combination of post-positivist measurement and interpretivist understanding (Morgan, 2007 Creswell; 2018).

Methodology: Convergent Design

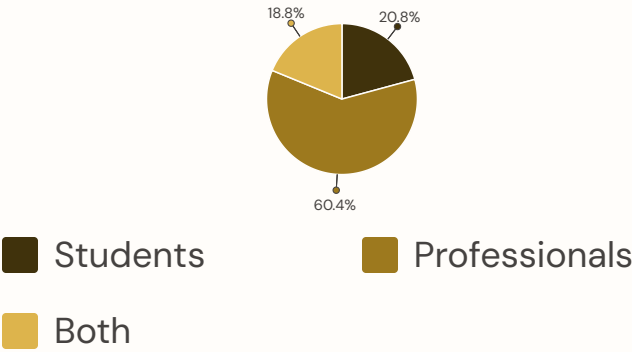
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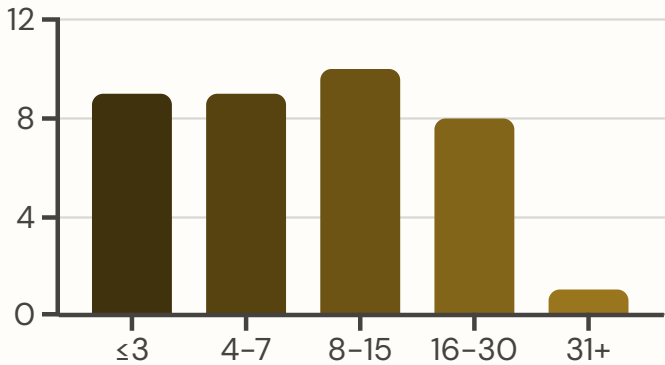
Sample Demographics



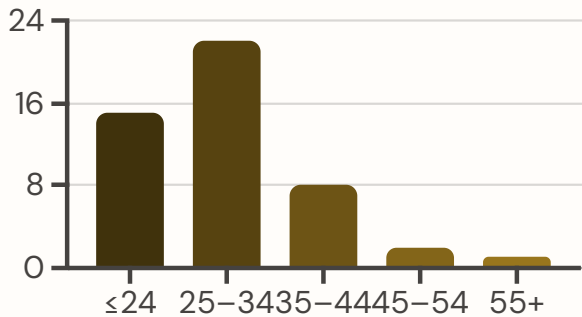
Participants by Role



Years of Performance Experience



Age Distribution



Quantitative Findings: K-MPAI Scores

MPA by Age Group

Age Group	Count	Mean	SD
<=24	15	114.47	30.03
25-34	22	126.68	40.89
35-44	8	122.0	49.13
45-54	2	143.5	53.03
55+	1	182.0	nan

MPA by Self-Reported Symptoms

MPA Symptom Self-Report	Count	Mean	SD
Never	3	138.33	59.94
Rarely	4	170.25	23.75
Sometimes	28	130.32	30.87
Often	13	92.62	35.84

MPA by Years of Experience

Experience Group	Count	Mean	SD
<=3	9	114.11	18.8
4-7	9	108.44	35.61
8-15	10	137.1	38.69
16-30	8	152.38	37.11
31+	1	182.0	nan

Overall Anxiety Levels

Moderate to high MPA was observed across the sample, indicating widespread performance anxiety.

Age Effect

Younger performers consistently scored higher on anxiety measures, suggesting particular vulnerability.

Experience Factor

Less experienced performers reported significantly elevated MPA symptoms compared to seasoned professionals.

Quantitative Results: Age and Experience

MPA Scores by Age Group

A clear trend emerged:

- Younger performers reported the highest K-MPAI scores.
- Performers aged 24 or younger displayed the highest anxiety
- Anxiety decreased gradually across age groups..

MPA Scores by Performance Experience

The findings mirrored the age trend:

- Performers with ≤ 3 years of experience had the highest MPA.
- Anxiety progressively declined with accumulated experience.
- Those with 16–30 years and 31+ years showed the lowest levels of MPA.

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MPA and Precarity Correlation

Key Findings

Data seems to indicate the correlations between precarious working conditions and elevated MPA scores.

- High MPA correlated with fear of evaluation, self-doubt, and somatic tension
- Precarity measures significantly predicted higher MPA levels
- Younger performers demonstrated greater vulnerability to both precarity and anxiety
- Income instability emerged as a particularly strong predictor



Qualitative Results

Thematic Analysis-Six Themes: Overview

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun & Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis framework (2006, 2019).

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses produced six interconnected themes that illuminate the lived experience of MPA within precarious conditions:

1

Professional Uncertainty and Chronic Instability

Participants described constant worry about securing work, maintaining income, and finding future opportunities.

"I never know when I will have work again. That creates constant anxiety."

2

Gatekeeping and Unequal Access

Success in Portugal often depends on informal social circles, personal connections, and opaque selection processes rather than merit alone.

"I feel I am not part of the right circle and that affects everything."

3

Fear of Evaluation and Scrutiny

The constant need to prove oneself in auditions and performances intensifies anxiety about judgement and failure.

"Every performance feels like proving that I deserve to be a musician."

4

Emotional and Physical Strain

Precarity produces exhaustion, muscular tension, and somatic symptoms that directly intensify MPA during performances.

"My body reacts straight away – cold hands and short beath."

5

Erosion of Self-Confidence

Participants described feelings of replaceability, profound self-doubt, and heightened sensitivity to criticism within competitive environments.

"There is always someone ready to take your place." / "I become very sensitive to any criticism"

6

Identity and Perfectionism

Many performers tied their identity to artistic perfection, with precarity amplifying the stakes of every performance.

"My identity is tied to my artistic work." / "I feel I have to be perfect to be taken seriously"

Mixed-Methods Findings

Convergences: Where Data Aligned

High Overall MPA Levels Both quantitative (K-MPAI) and qualitative data confirmed high overall MPA levels, including physical and emotional symptoms.	Age and Experience Younger, less experienced performers showed higher anxiety in both datasets, while older performers demonstrated more resilience.	Precarity and MPA Correlation A positive correlation was found: higher precarity correlated with higher MPA scores, with qualitative data linking instability to chronic stress and intensified performance anxiety.
MPA Subscales & Thematic Analysis Match MPA subscales (somatic symptoms, worry, self-scrutiny) directly mirrored themes from qualitative analysis (bodily strain, chronic uncertainty, fear of judgement).	Impact, Coping, and Help-Seeking Data converged on MPA's impact (primarily on performance), mostly self-initiated coping strategies, and low rates of professional help-seeking.	

Divergences: Unexpected Findings

Acceptance of Instability: Some normalized precarious conditions as inherent to artistic careers.	Positive Stress: A small group viewed stress as energizing, enhancing focus rather than debilitating.	Not Internalising Judgement: A minority did not internalise judgement, describing themselves as unaffected by others' evaluations.
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Conceptual Model: The Precarity–MPA Cycle

Precarity Creates Stress

Unstable work and income generate chronic psychological pressure.

Cycle Reinforces

Fewer opportunities deepen precarity, restarting the cycle.



Stress Intensifies Anxiety

Chronic stress manifests as somatic and cognitive MPA symptoms.

MPA Undermines Performance

Performance anxiety degrades artistic quality and confidence.

Reduced Opportunities

Compromised performances lead to fewer engagements and income.

This self-perpetuating cycle demonstrates how structural precarity and individual anxiety mutually reinforce each other, creating systemic barriers to sustainable artistic careers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Conclusions

- MPA levels are moderate to high across Portuguese performing artists
- Precarity strongly correlates with elevated MPA symptoms
- Younger and early-career performers report greatest vulnerability
- Structural labour conditions intensify psychological anxiety
- MPA must be understood as both personal *and* socio-structural

Recommendations

Education & Training

- Embed MPA awareness in curricula
- Teach simple CBT + somatic tools
- Train teachers to support student wellbeing

Institutions & Policy

- Improve fairness: auditions + contracts
- Ensure fair pay & reduce recibos verdes reliance
- Prioritise sustainable, supportive funding

Psychological Support

- Increase access to mental-health resources
- Offer low-intensity / drop-in interventions
- Use evidence-based tools adapted to arts contexts

Limitations and Future Research

Study Limitations

1

Small Sample Size

Pilot sample of only 48 participants limits generalisability of findings.

2

Unbalanced Ratio

Uneven distribution between students and professionals affects comparative analysis.

3

Cross-Sectional Design

Lack of longitudinal follow-up prevents tracking anxiety trajectories over time.

4

Non-Clinical Self-Report Measures

Self-reported responses rely on subjective interpretation and do not constitute clinical diagnoses

Future Research Directions

- Study precarity–MPA over time & across disciplines
- Examine gender/socioeconomic influences
- Pilot an MPA workshop to test real-time impact

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Thank You

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