
5. Titel: ***“Het brein van de musicus: de schaduwzijde van creativiteit.”***

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Abstract:

Performing artists are at risk to be afflicted by a range of physical and psychiatric disorders. In the last decades the attention for physical problems has increased. The attention for mental disorders unfortunately lags behind. This delay is concerning as mental problems are a main cause for significant suffering and disability in performing artists. In order to meet the need for specialized psychiatric care for performing artists, the first outpatient psychiatric clinic for performing artists has opened its doors since 2008. The clinic is part of the department of psychiatry at the Leiden University Medical Centre in the Netherlands and is established by a psychiatrist who has also been trained as a professional violinist. Until now more than 40 patients have frequented the clinic. One of the main reasons for patients to seek help is stage fright.

Stage fright is a complicated psychiatric disorder, which is classified as a social phobia according to the DSM-IV and is characterized by irrational and catastrophic assumptions, dysfunctional behavior and physiological symptoms. Bodily symptoms, like tachycardia and muscle tremor are caused by excessive catecholamine release. The scientific body of literature on stage fright or performing anxiety is limited. Prevalence ranges from 16-70 percent and symptoms often cause severe professional and personal impairment. The results for sex and age distribution are still ambiguous.

Assessment of patients seeking help for their stage fright at our clinic was performed with a psychiatric interview and several validated psychometric instruments. The criteria for social phobia were often not met and the diagnosed psychiatric disorders underlying stage fright were diverse. A majority of patients suffered from posttraumatic stress symptoms, originating from a specific bad performance or negative critics following a certain performance. Stimuli related to the specific traumatic event (like an audience, a concert hall etcetera) activated the initial trauma again and this process maintained negative performing experiences and thus intensify stage fright. The hypothesis of stage fright as a posttraumatic stress disorder has been affirmed by the positive results of eye movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy. Another group of patients, displaying stage fright was diagnosed with a depressive disorder. Patients suffering from a depressive disorder complain of a lack of concentration, memory impairment and negative assumptions concerning the self; symptoms which obviously interfere negatively with a stage performance.

In conclusion, stage fright is not a well-defined disorder and can be symptomatic for underlying psychopathology. Posttraumatic stress disorder and depressive disorder are just two examples of psychiatric disorders underlying stage fright. In order to treat stage fright effectively patients deserve a serious psychiatric work up and a subsequent evidence based treatment of the psychiatric disorder at hand.
