

The Relationship between Fame and Fortune in Performance Related Careers with a Shorter Life Expectancy due to Accidents, Addiction, Homicide and Suicide

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Abstract

Around 92% of the US population dies from natural causes. However, only 49% of famous musician stars die from natural causes resulting in performance related careers being one of the most dangerous professions in the United States. According to this study, musicians were 20 times more likely to die from an addiction, four times more likely to die from an accident, six times more likely to die of homicide and four times more likely to die of suicide than the general population. Why do dangerous profession lists fail to include musicians in the high risk career list categories? It is not the profession that is dangerous, but primarily the personality type gravitating towards the profession that creates risk. Should certain personality types be directed to non-performance related careers? Probably not, since performing on stage may be a more effective intervention than psychiatric treatment.

Keywords: Accidents, Alcohol, Anxiety, depression, homicide, musicians and suicide.

Introduction

Is there a relationship between fame in performance related careers with the shorter life expectancy due to accidents, drug overdose, homicide and suicide? The number of musicians, Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Keith Moon, Sid Vicious, Kurt Cobain, Amy

Winehouse, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston and Prince who died of addiction is staggering. Epstein & Epstein (2013) reported that the average age of performers (77.1 years), sports players (77.4 years) and creative workers (78.5 years) were much lower than the life expectancy of military personnel (84.7 years), those in business (83.3 years) and politicians (82.1 years).

Being a popular musician is a known occupational risk factor for depression, anxiety, alcohol misuse and suicide (Raeburn et al, 2003). In one survey of 972 non-classical musicians, 24% of respondents had depressive symptoms affecting their performance compared to the 9.5% depression rate in the general United States adult population (Chesky, 2002). Kenny (2014) found that the lifespans of popular musicians were up to 25 years shorter than the comparable United States population while, accidental death rates were between 5 and 10 times greater, suicide rates were between two and seven times greater and homicide rates were up to eight times greater than the general United States adult population.

Literature Review

Musicians tend to die sooner, more unexpectedly and more violently than the average person living in the United States due to the lifestyles they adopt and the risks they face. In the United Kingdom and the United States, rock and pop stars have died younger than the general population and continue to do so until 25 years after they first become famous (Bellis *et al.*, 2007). A group of researchers in the United Kingdom found that between 2 and 25 years from their initial rise to fame, rock stars tend to experience two to three times the risk of mortality expected in a similar group of non-rock stars matched by sex, age, and ethnicity (Phillips, 2013).

Popular musicians have shorter life expectancies compared to the general population and have significantly higher incidences of liver-related disease and suicide (Kessler *et al*, 2005). Relationships between fame and mortality vary with performers' characteristics primarily caused by traumatic experiences in early life resulting in them becoming predisposed to health-damaging behaviors. Fame and fortune provide greater opportunities to engage in risk-taking as well as substance use. For deceased stars, cause of death was often substance use or a risk-related death stemming from an adverse childhood experience (Bellis *et al*, 2012). Some of the victims suffered from insomnia, such as Michael Jackson, who used out-of-hospital use of the general anesthetic administered by a private physician to induce sleep that had a fatal consequence. Up to 20% of popular musicians reported that stage fright negatively impacted their performance, while the average American reported a prevalence rate of 8.7% (Kessler *et al*, 2005).

Rock and Roll musicians often deal with anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, which is a reason many rock artists die young and often from unusual circumstances (Lucijanić, 2010). Bellis (2007) reports increased mortality in rock and pop stars are due to psychological caused from pressure from fans, media, obtrusive paparazzi and the music industry so drugs and alcohol are often used to cope. Bandelow (2006) pointed out that the main reasons for premature death was alcohol addiction and chronic substance abuse. However, there were other reasons for increased mortality, which included suicide, accidents and violence that suggest a certain psychiatric illness. Borderline personality disorder features substance abuse, impulsive behavior, high-risk behavior, depression, suicidality, unsteady interpersonal relationships, problems with sexuality, feelings of emptiness and eating disorders (Bandelow, 2006).

The striking relationship between death, drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll may be explained by the dopamine reward system and the associated endogenous opioid system of the human brain.

Borderline patients seem to have a dysfunction of these systems, which they try to compensate by using heroin and cocaine, drugs that stimulate these systems directly (Andreasen, 1987).

Despite being a vulnerable patient group, celebrities can have a significant influence people's health behaviors through biological, psychological and social processes (Just, 2016).

Just (2016), who studied 220 celebrities that died from a drug-related death involved substance abuse between 1970 and 2015, reported that the average age at death was 38.6 years. Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain and others died at the age of 27 (Lucijanić, 2010). According to Bandelow (2006) in most studies with borderline patients, the mean age is around 27 years, which may be a possible explanation for the common death rate at the age of 27. Bandelow (2007) wrote that going back to Aristotle, many have recognized the association between melancholia and poetry. Many scientific scholars have investigated the relationship of “genius and madness” and many studies have reported significantly increased rates of psychiatric disorders in artists, in particular in performance artists (Andreasen, Ludwig & Post). Bellis (2007) reported that an analysis of the biographies of pop stars that died young showed that features of personality disorders that were present before these stars got famous. In a review of United States census data from 1990, the suicide rate in musicians was estimated to be 42.6 per 100,000, or 3.4 times higher than the general population (Berg et al, 2018).

Violent deaths accounted for 20% of all deaths for older musicians, a figure three times higher than for a comparable general population and mortality patterns were similar for male and female musicians (Kenny & Asher, 2017). The most commonly reported cause of death of American hip-hop and rap recording artists from 1987 – 2014 was homicide. The 280 deaths were categorized as homicide (55%), unintentional injury (13%), cardiovascular (7%), undetermined/undisclosed (7%), cancer (6%), other (5%), suicide (4%), and infectious disease (3%). The mean reported age at death was

30 years of age (range 15-75) and the median was 29 years of age; 97% were male and 92% were black and all but one of the homicides were committed with a firearm (Lawson, 2015).

Methodology and Results

An on-line random Wikipedia search of famous musician deaths was conducted and data was compiled alphabetically by artist in Table 1. According to the CDC (2020), around 92% of the United States population dies from natural causes. However, only 49% of famous musicians die from natural causes making being a famous musician one of the most dangerous professions in the United States. The present study also found that famous musicians were 20 times more likely to die of a drug overdose, four times more likely to die of an accident, six times more likely to die of homicide and four times more likely to die of suicide than the general population.

Table 1: Musician Natural & Non-Natural Death Rate									
Artist	Name	Death	D	A	H	S	N	YR	Description
Aaliyah	Aaliyah Haughton	2001		X				22	Plane crash (Bahamas)
AC/DC	Bon Scott	1980	X					33	Alcohol Poisoning (London)
Alice in Chains	Layne Staley	2002	X					34	Speedball overdose (Seattle)
Allman Brothers	Duane Allman	1971		X				24	Motorcycle crash (Georgia)
Anderson, Lynn	Lynn Anderson	2015					X	67	Heart attack (Nashville)
Armstrong, Louis	Louis Armstrong	1971					X	69	Heart attack (NYC)
Badfinger	Pete Ham	1975				X		27	Suicide by hanging (England)
Baker, Laverne	Dolores Baker	1997					X	67	Heart Disease (Chicago)
Ballard, Hank	John Hendricks	2003					X	75	Throat Cancer (LA)
B.B. King	Riley King	2015					X	89	Diabetes (Las Vegas)
Beach Boys	Carl Wilson	1998					X	51	Lung cancer (LA)
	Denis Wilson	1983		X				39	Drowned (LA)
Beatles	John Lennon	1980			X			40	Shot on sidewalk (NYC)
	George Harrison	2001					X	58	Lung cancer (LA)
Bee Gees	Maurice Gibb	2003					X	53	Intestine complications (Miami)
	Robin Gibb	2012					X	62	Colorectal cancer (London)
Berry, Chuck	Charles Berry	2017					X	90	Heart attack (Missouri)
Big Joe Turner	Joseph Turner	1985					X	74	Heart Failure (LA)
The Big Bopper	Jiles Richardson	1959		X				28	Plane Crash (Iowa)
Blind Melon	Shannon Hoon	1995	X					28	Cocaine overdose (Louisiana)
Brown, James	James Brown	2006					X	73	Heart failure (Atlanta)
Brown, Ruth	Ruth Brown	2006					X	76	Heart attack (Nevada)
Bo Diddley	Ellas McDaniel	2008					X	79	Heart failure (Florida)
Bowie, David	David Jones	2016					X	69	Liver cancer (NYC)
Byrds	Clarence White	1973		X				29	Hit by drunk driver (CA)
Campbell, Glen	Glen Campbell	2017					X	81	Natural Causes (Tennessee)
Canned Heat	Alan Wilson	1970	X					27	Drug overdose (LA)
Cars	Benjamin Orr	2000					X	53	Pancreatic cancer (Georgia)
Cash, Johnny	Johnny Cash	2003					X	71	Diabetes (Tennessee)
Chapin, Harry	Harry Chapin	1981		X				38	Car accident (New York)
Charles, Ray	Ray Charles	2004						73	Liver Disease (LA)
Chicago	Terry Kath	1978		X				31	Gunshot to the head (LA)
The Clash	Joe Strummer	2002					X	50	Congenital heart defect (England)
Cline, Patsy	Patsy Cline	1963		X				30	Plane crash (Tennessee)
Coasters	Cornell Gunter	1990			X			53	Shot in his car (Las Vegas)
Cochran, Eddy	Edward Cochran	1960		X				21	Car accident (England)
Cole, Nat King	Nat King Cole	1965					X	45	Lung cancer (LA)
Cooke, Sam	Samuel Cook	1964			X			33	Shot at hotel (LA)
Cream	Jack Bruce	2014					X	71	Liver disease (England)
CCR	Tom Fogerty	1990					X	48	Infected with HIV (Arizona)
Croce, Jim	Jim Croce	1973		X				30	Plane crash (Louisiana)
Darin, Bobby	Walden Cassotto	1973						37	Sepsis (LA)
Davis, Miles	Miles Davis	1991					X	65	Pneumonia (LA)
Def Leppard	Steve Clark	1991	X					30	Alcohol Poisoning (London)
Del Shannon	Charles Westover	1990						55	Suicide by gunshot (CA)
Denver, John	Henry Deutschen	1997		X				53	Plane crash (Monterey Bay)
Deep Purple	Tommy Bolen	1976	X					25	Drug overdose (Miami)
Dio, Ronny James	Ronald Padavona	2010					X	67	Stomach cancer (Houston)
Doors	Jim Morrison	1971	X					27	Drug overdose (Paris)
Dunn, Holly	Holly Dunn	2016					X	59	Ovarian cancer (NM)
Dusty Springfield	Mary O'brien	1999					X	59	Breast cancer (London)
Eagles	Glenn Frey	2016					X	67	Pneumonia (NYC)
ELO	Mike Edwards	2010		X				62	Car accident (England)
Everly Brothers	Phil Everly	2014					X	74	Lung Disease (LA)
Falco	Johann Holzel	1998		X				40	Car Crash (Dominican Republic)
Fats Domino	Antoine Domino	2017					X	89	Natural causes (Louisiana)
Four Tops	Lawrence Payton	1997					X	59	Liver cancer (Michigan)
	Levi Stubbs	2008					X	72	Died in his sleep (Michigan)
Franklin, Aretha	Aretha Franklin	2018					X	76	Pancreatic Cancer (Detroit)
Gaye, Marvin	Marvin Gaye	1984			X			44	Shot by dad at home (LA)
Gentry, Troy	Troy Gentry	2017		X				50	Helicopter crash (New Jersey)

Gibb, Andy	Andy Gibb	1988	X					30	Drug overdose (London)
Grateful Dead	Ron McKernan	1973	X				X	27	Autoimmune disease (CA)
	Jerry Garcia	1995					X	52	Heart attack (CA)
Haggard, Merle	Merle Haggard	2016					X	79	Pneumonia (CA)
Haley, Bill	William Haley	1981					X	55	Heart attack (Texas)
Hendrix, Jimi	Jimi Hendrix	1970	X					27	Drug overdose (London)
Holly, Buddy	Buddy Holly	1959		X				22	Plane crash (Iowa)
Hooker, John Lee	John Lee Hooker	2001					X	83	Died in his sleep (CA)
Houston, Whitney	Whitney Houston	2012	X					48	Overdose & drowned (LA)
INXS	Mike Huchence	1997					X	37	Suicide by hanging (Sydney)
Jackson, Michael	Michael Jackson	2009				X		50	Administered Propofol (LA)
James, Etta	Etta Hawkins	2012					X	73	Leukemia (LA)
Jefferson Airplane	Marty Balin	2018					X	76	Undisclosed (Florida)
Jones, Davy	David Jones	2012					X	66	Heart attack (Florida)
Jones, George	George Jones	2013					X	81	Natural Causes (Tennessee)
Joplin, Janis	Janis Joplin	1970	X					27	Heroin overdose (LA)
King, Albert	Albert Nelson	1992					X	69	Heart attack (Tennessee)
Led Zeppelin	John Bonham	1980		X				32	Choked to death (England)
LeDoux, Chris	Chris LeDoux	2005					X	56	Liver cancer (Wyoming)
Linkin Park	Chester Bennington	2017					X	41	Suicide by Hanging (LA)
Lymon, Frankie	Frankie Lymon	1968	X					25	Heroin Overdose (NYC)
Lynyrd Skynyrd	Ronnie Van Zant	1977		X				29	Plane crash (Mississippi)
	Steven Gaines	1977		X				28	Plane crash (Mississippi)
Mamas & Papas	Cass Elliot	1974					X	34	Heart Failure (London)
Marley, Bob	Robert Marley	1981					X	36	Skin Cancer (Miami)
Marshall Tucker	Tommy Caldwell	1980		X				30	Car accident (SC)
Mayfield, Curtis	Curtis Mayfield	1999					X	57	Diabetes (GA)
McCready, Mindy	Mindy McCready	2013					X	37	Suicide by Gunshot (Arkansas)
McPhatter, Clyde	Clyde McPhatter	1972	X					39	Alcohol abuse (NYC)
Metallica	Cliff Burton	1986		X				24	Tour bus crash (Sweden)
Michael, George	George Michael	2006					X	53	Heart Condition (England)
Miller, Glenn	Glenn Miller	1944		X				40	Plane crash (English Channel)
Motorhead	Lemmy Lilmister	2015					X	70	Prostate cancer (LA)
Muddy Waters	McKinley Morgan	1983					X	70	Heart Failure (Illinois)
Nelson, Ricky	Ricky Nelson	1985		X				45	Plane crash (Texas)
Nirvana	Kurt Cobain	1994					X	27	Suicide by gunshot (Seattle)
Notorious BIG	Chris Wallace	1997				X		24	Drive by shooting (LA)
N.W.A.	Easy-E	1995					X	30	HIV/AIDS (LA)
Orbison, Roy	Roy Orbison	1988					X	52	Heart attack (Tennessee)
Ozzy Osbourne	Randy Rhoads	1982		X				25	Plane crash into tour bus (Florida)
Perkins, Carl	Carl Lee Perkins	1998					X	65	Stroke (Tennessee)
Petty, Tom	Tom Petty	2017	X					66	Drug Overdose (LA)
Pickett, Wilson	Wilson Pickett	2006					X	64	Heart attack (Virginia)
Pink Floyd	Sid Barret	2006	X					60	Drug overdose (England)
Pitney, Gene	Gene Pitney	2006					X	66	Heart attack (United Kingdom)
The Pretenders	James Honeyman	1982	X					25	Cocaine overdose (London)
	Pete Farndon	1983	X					30	Heroin overdose (England)
Presley, Elvis	Elvis Presley	1977	X					42	Drug Overdose (Tennessee)
Prince	Rogers Nelson	2016	X					57	Fentanyl overdose (Minnesota)
Queen	Freddie Mercury	1991					X	45	Bronchial pneumonia (London)
Rabbitt, Eddie	Eddie Rabbitt	1998					X	56	Lung cancer (Tennessee)
Ramones	Johnny Ramone	2004					X	55	Prostate Cancer (LA)
	Dee Dee Ramone	2002	X					50	Heroin Overdose (LA)
	Joey Ramone	2001					X	49	Lymphoma (NYC)
	Tommy Ramone	2014					X	65	Bile duct cancer (New York)
RH Chili Peppers	Bradley Nowell	1988	X					26	Heroin Overdose (LA)
Redding, Otis	Otis Redding	1967		X				26	Plane Crash (Wisconsin)
Reed, Lou	Lewis Allan Reed	2013					X	71	Liver disease (New York)
Reed, Jimmy	Mathis Reed	1976					X	50	Respiratory Failure (CA)
Reeves, Jim	Jim Reeves	1964		X				40	Plane Crash (Tennessee)
Righteous Brothers	Bobby Hatfield	2003	X					63	Cocaine overdose (Michigan)
Robbins, Marty	Martin Robinson	1982					X	57	Heart attack (Tennessee)
Rolling Stones	Brian Jones	1969	X					27	Drug Drowning (England)
The Ronettes	Estelle Bennett	2009					X	67	Colon cancer (New Jersey)
Run DMC	Jam Master Jay	2002				X		37	Gunshot (NYC)
Sam & Dave	Dave Prater	1988		X				50	Car accident (Georgia)

Selena	Selena Quintanilla	1995			X			23	Shot by fan (Texas)
Sex Pistols	Sid Vicious	1979	X					21	Heroin overdose (NYC)
Shakur, Tupac	Tupac Shakur	1996			X			25	Drive by shooting (Las Vegas)
The Shirelles	Doris Coley	2000					X	58	Breast cancer (CA)
Sinatra, Frank	Frank Sinatra	1998					X	82	Heart attack (LA)
Sledge, Percy	Percy Sledge	2015					X	73	Liver Cancer (Louisiana)
Solomon Burke	James McDonald	2010					X	70	Pulmonary embolism (Europe)
Sound Garden	Chris Cornell	2017				X		52	Suicide by hanging (Detroit)
Stanley, Ralph	Ralph Stanley	2016				X		89	Skin Cancer (Virginia)
Steely Dan	Walter Becker	2017					X	67	Throat Cancer (NYC)
Steppenwolf	Rushton Moreve	1981		X				32	Car accident (LA)
Stone Temple Pilots	Scott Weiland	2015	X					48	Drug overdose (Minnesota)
Summer, Donna	Donna Summer	2012					X	63	Lung cancer (Florida)
Supremes	Florence Ballard	1976					X	32	Coronary Thrombosis (Detroit)
T. Rex	Marc Bolan	1977						29	Car accident (London)
Temptations	Paul Williams	1973				X		34	Suicide by gunshot (Detroit)
Turner, Ike	Ike Turner	2007	X					76	Cocaine Overdose (CA)
Twitty, Conway	Conway Twitty	1993						59	Ruptured blood vessel (Missouri)
Valens, Ritchie	Ritchie Valens	1959		X				17	Plane Crash (Iowa)
Vaughn, Stevie R.	Stephen Vaughan	1990		X				35	Helicopter crash (Wisconsin)
Vincent, Gene	Vincent Craddock	1971						36	Stomach Ulcer (California)
West, Dottie	Dorothy Marsh	1991		X				58	Car accident (Tennessee)
The Who	Keith Moon	1978	X					32	Drug Overdose (London)
Whitley, Keith	Keith Whitley	1989	X					33	Alcohol poisoning (Tennessee)
Vandross, Luther	Luther Vandross	2005					X	54	Heart attack (New Jersey)
Williams, Hank	Hank Williams	1953	X					29	Alcohol and Drugs (Virginia)
Wilson, Jackie	Jack Wilson	1984					X	49	Pneumonia (New Jersey)
Winehouse, Amy	Amy Winehouse	2011	X					27	Alcohol Poisoning (London)
Womack, Bobby	Robert Womack	2014					X	70	Natural causes (LA)
Wynette, Tammy	Tammy Wynette	1998					X	55	Lung blood clot (Tennessee)
Yard Birds	Keith Relf	1976		X				33	Electrocuted by guitar (London)
Zappa, Frank	Frank Zappa	1993					X	52	Prostate cancer (LA)
TOTAL (158)			32	32	9	7	78		
Musician %			20	20	6	4	49		
US %			1	5	1	1	92		

D = Drugs & Alcohol, A = Accident, H = Homicide, S = Suicide & N = Natural Causes

Thirty-eight out of 158 surveyed died in California, twenty-four out of 158 surveyed died in the United Kingdom (England & London), fourteen out of 158 surveyed died in the state Tennessee, twelve out of 158 surveyed died in the state of New York, seven out of the 158 surveyed died in the state of Michigan, five out of the 158 surveyed died in the state of Florida and four out of the 158 surveyed died in either New Jersey, Texas or Louisiana.

Conclusion

According to the Bureau of Labor (2019), there were 5,250 workplace deaths in 2018 and transportation accidents accounted for 40% of work-related deaths. The most dangerous jobs list often includes fishing, farming, logging, law enforcement, firemen, first responders and construction, but being a famous musician as a dangerous profession was not found on any list of

dangerous professions by the author of the present study. Why do these lists fail to include famous musicians in the high risk career list categories? Research seems to suggest that it is not the profession that is the danger, but the personality type that gravitates towards the profession that creates the risk.

According to Nabi, *et al* (2008) Neurotic hostility, CHD-prone personality, as well as an anti-social personality were all predictive of mortality outcomes. Narcissism is one of the main features of borderline personality disorder, and this explains why the affected persons try harder to get famous and develop more creativity and fantasy as musicians, actors or writers (Bandelow, 2006). Due to their high emotionality, their performance is perceived as more touching and authentic by the public. Should society warn persons at risk about the dangers of getting famous? Probably not, according to Bandelow (2006) performing on stage may be a more successful therapy than any psychiatric treatment, and without these exceptional artists, our culture would suffer great losses.

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