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RISK FACTORS AND INJURY OF ORCHESTRAL MUSICIANS IN AUSTRALIA

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Objectives Like elite athletes, professional orchestral musicians are required to perform at or near their peak on a regular basis. Anecdotal evidence suggests musicians have a significant injury burden arising from their playing, but there is little solid evidence of the extent and nature of health problems in orchestral musicians. The aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of the main results from a questionnaire that was undertaken at the beginning of a longitudinal study of all professional orchestral musicians in Australia.

Methods The questionnaire was completed as part of a cross-sectional survey which also involved a physical examination. Approximately 70% of eligible musicians participated. Questions in the survey covered a range of demographic, risk factor, pain and injury and psychological questions relevant to the work of the musicians.

Results Useable information was available from 378 musicians. They had been playing professionally for a mean of 20.6 years (sd=10.7). Most (74%) worked full time. 84% had in the past experienced pain that had interfered with their playing at some time; 50% had such pain at the time of the survey; and 28% had required time off for this in the previous 18 months. These proportions varied considerably with instrument played. Important risk factors identified by musicians included excess muscle tension; insufficient rest, long practice sessions, muscle fatigue, poor posture, repertoire and scheduling, and sudden increase in playing time.

Conclusions This information will be used to underpin the development of preventive programs and education for the musicians.