

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN ARTS & CULTURE

Health Sustainability of Popular Musicians in Ghana

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CITATION: Coffie, M. M. (2023). Health sustainability of popular musicians in Ghana. *Journal of African Arts & Culture*, 6(3), 1-21.

Abstract



In this study, I bring to the fore some prominent popular musicians whose careers were truncated due to ill health and have passed on recently as an attempt to stimulate a discourse towards the health sustainability of popular musicians in Ghana for a sustainable career and industry. Drawing on descriptive research design, document analysis, and interviews for data collection, I observed that only a few prominent Ghanaian popular musicians had sustained their careers for over five decades. At the same time, some are grappling to do so due to ill health. I conclude that the health sustainability of popular musicians is paramount to the sustainability of Ghana's music industry. Therefore, popular musicians should prioritise their health as a matter of urgency in their quest to have a sustainable career. I hope this study serves as a moderate contribution to Ghanaian popular music scholarship, marks the beginning of a new direction, stimulates debates, and gives rise to similar research in other creative arts traditions.

Keywords: Career, health, music industry, popular musicians, sustainability

Introduction

The experiences and benefits of music in people's lives have garnered increased attention among scholars (Acquah, 2016; Armstrong, 2016; Carl & Kutsidzo, 2017; Kurdi & Gasti, 2017). It is common knowledge that every society has its music. In Africa, music permeates every aspect of human life, from birth to death (Agawu, 2003). Music has been used

therapeutically to cure various ailments (Joyce & Moss, 2021; Kusumahati et al., 2021; Ogembo et al., 2021; Upthade & Khandare, 2022). This ubiquitous nature of music makes the role of musicians critical in every society, and so does their health. However, musicians and other performing artists may suffer from health problems related to their occupations and lifestyles, thus interrupting their careers. Scholars have attempted to address the health problems of musicians (Chong et al., 1989; Kenny & Ackermann, 2008). These occupational health problems mainly include neuro-musculoskeletal, skin, respiratory, and noise-induced hearing impairment (Cohen & Panebianco, 2020; Katsuki, 2021; Matei et al., 2018; Mustajbegovic et al., 2005). Also, Kenny and Ackermann (2008) explored physical and psychological aspects of musical performance that will optimise individual performances and assist the musician in enjoying a long and sustainable career in the music profession, unencumbered by the myriad health issues that can afflict a professional musician. As much as addressing the aforementioned occupational health problems is in the right direction, other non-occupational health-related issues also threaten the career sustainability of musicians. I contend that musicians' career sustainability is intrinsically linked to their health sustainability. Therefore, the musician's health-related issues must be discussed holistically and not be limited to occupational health problems.

A preliminary investigation of entertainment talk shows in the media space in Ghana reveals that interviews and discussions on the popular music scene focus on the musicians' creativity, brand management, future projects and trending issues. For instance, radio and television entertainment talk shows, such as Entertainment Review (Peace FM), United Showbiz (UTV), Showbiz 360 (TV3), Asempa Showbiz (Asempa FM) and Prime Entertainment (Joy Prime) discuss trending issues considering the week under review. Below are some posters or flyers showing issues usually addressed on some popular radio and television stations in Ghana.



Fig. 1: Onua FM



Fig. 2: Metro TV

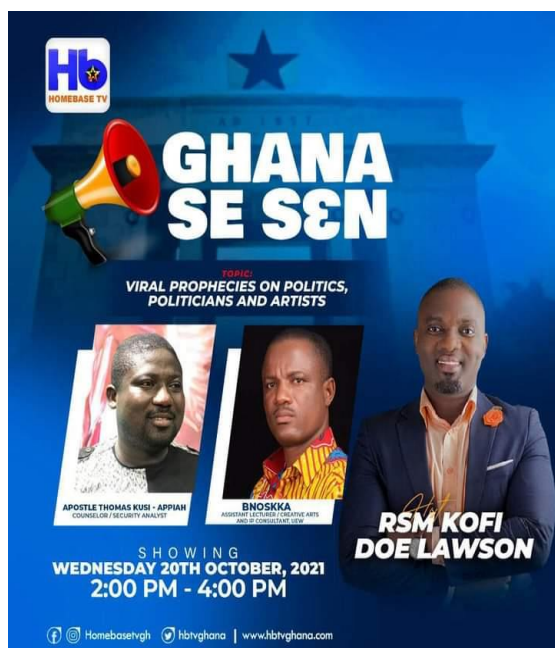


Fig. 3: Homebase TV



Fig. 4: Happy FM



Fig. 5: Neat FM



Fig. 6: Adom FM



Fig. 7: Asempa FM



Fig. 8: Kasapa FM

Considering the topics usually addressed, especially on the various electronic media platforms, as indicated on the posters of the above entertainment talk shows, one may infer that issues of the musician's health sustainability rarely get attention during such discussions. However, it is

instructive to note that health issues are ubiquitous; some people will likely have their careers truncated due to prevailing health conditions. Others, too, may have their careers truncated by accidents, reasons best known to them, or even death.

Ghana's popular music scene has recently been saddled with prominent young musicians' consistent ailing and demise. For instance, Dennis Dwamena (KiDi), a famous young Ghanaian Afro-pop singer, also cancelled a tour in the USA to attend to his health-related issues. On KiDi's official *Facebook page* on April 14, 2023, he narrates: *A little under two months ago, I made a painful decision of cancelling my tour to take care of my health, that included taking time off social media.* However, KiDi quickly added that he is glad to return to doing what he loves most: creating and performing music, which suggests his health has improved. Likewise, Jackline Acheampong (Gyakie), another famous young Ghanaian Afro-pop singer, recently postponed her UK tour due to ill health. According to Gyakie, as she narrates on her *Instagram Story* and published by *MyJoyOnline* on May 19, 2023, *My lovely people, your girl is not well, fighting everything to get better for my shows this weekend, but I can't fight myself no matter how hard I try. However, I hope to be fit enough to see you all at the festivals I'll be performing at.* It is truistic that the driving force of the music industry is composing, recording, and performing. Therefore, KiDi and Gyakie's situation gives credence to the fact that the music industry's sustainability, to a greater extent, depends on the health sustainability of the musician.

In contrast to KiDi and Gyakie's situation, Mustapha Rahman, a Ghanaian Reggae-Dancehall artiste known in showbiz as Rudebwoy Ranking, who, according to Ghanaian media, such as *MyJoyOnline* and *Classfm Online*, passed away on April 24, 2023, at the Ridge Hospital in Accra at age 32, where he was receiving treatment for an undisclosed illness. Similarly, prominent musicians, such as Reverend Prince Nyarko, Reverend Ferdinand David Larbi Martinson, Philip Brown (Eyoh Soundboy) and Samuel Asare (Agya Yaw), have passed on in less than a year due to health-related issues. It is worth noting that these unfortunate situations are a few of the many examples. This trend will negatively impact the music industry and Ghana's socioeconomic development if not addressed and curtailed. I do not intend to investigate popular musicians' general lifestyle, which might have contributed to their state of health. Neither do I want to find out the actual cause of death, which might require an autopsy report. Instead, I draw attention to prominent young musicians whose careers were truncated

due to ill health and have passed on to stimulate a discourse on the health sustainability of popular musicians in Ghana for a sustainable career and music industry.

Considering the prevailing circumstance where career sustainability has become a global phenomenon, I think discussions on the health sustainability of Ghanaian popular musicians are germane and a desideratum in popular music scholarship. Hereafter, I refer to musicians in this paper as popular musicians in Ghana with regional or national prominence. I also refer to young popular musicians as musicians who practise music genres distinct from art and traditional music for a living and are below 60.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is hinged on the theory of sustainability, which has become a vital issue widely discussed in every field of endeavour these days (Grange, 2016; Harrington, 2016; Lockley & Jarrath, 2013; Mason & Turner, 2020; Mensah, 2019; Schippers & Bendrups, 2015; Starik & Kanashiro, 2013; Titon, 2009; Titon & Pettan, 2015). This phenomenon is probably because of the current need to maintain and preserve the environment and culture. According to Harrington (2016), sustainability may be defined as the capacity to maintain or improve the state and availability of desirable materials or conditions over the long term. Harrington further explained that sustainability and sustainable development aim to maintain or enhance beneficial conditions (to sustain them), particularly with an improved capacity to extend desirable conditions over the long term. The studies above usually link the concepts of sustainability and development to the health of social-ecological systems and issues of cultural preservation. However, other disciplines have appropriated these concepts based on their interest; hence, sustainability concepts, such as education, social, economic, culture, music, career, and tourism, are gradually gaining scholarly attention.

Appropriating the sustainability concept to music, Grant (2014, p. 1) defined music sustainability as the *ability of a music genre to endure without implications of either a static*

tradition or a preservationist bearing. Regarding performing artists, Spiller (2022, p. 147) also viewed sustainable development as *establishing and maintaining an environment that encourages performing artists to build upon the music of the past to adapt it to fulfil current social needs.* Considering Grant and Spiller's view on music sustainability, one may infer that the focus is on the product (music) rather than the producer (musician). According to Pohlert (2019), social considerations are neglected in the music industry, with economic concerns taking precedence in that the music industry is well known for having propelled many musicians to fame through their creative endeavours; nevertheless, despite the billions of dollars, the industry brings in, very little money is invested in the artists who make money.

Interestingly, musicians spend most of their time on their creativity and brand to sustain their careers and relevance in the music industry. Furthermore, the creative works and the careers of musicians have always been the locus of discussions on the sustainability of the music industry (Adedeji, 2016). According to Alexandri et al. (2021), the creative industry, of which the music industry is a part, thrives on creativity, skill and talent. In other words, one's career success and sustainability are, to a more considerable extent, very much dependent on the attributes mentioned above. Brew (2019) also admitted the complex phenomenon of music career sustainability; in his view, talent alone is not enough for career sustainability. He further stated that musicians should see themselves as entrepreneurs while utilising their creative outputs. To this end, Brew (2023) posited that sustainable music careers are linked to and necessary for the sustainability of music cultures. In as much as I agree with Brew to some extent, I contend that creativity, skill, and talent do not exist in a vacuum but in an individual. Therefore, issues of music career sustainability must be discussed with the individual whose creativity, skill and talent reside at the locus, which should include the entire state of health (physical and mental).

Surprisingly, scholarly oeuvres on Ghanaian popular musicians over the years have also focused on their musical journey and celebratory relevance (Aidoo, 2014; Aidoo, 2019; Arko-Mensah et al., 2020; Boahen, 2015; Brew, 2019; Coffie, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Coffie et al., 2020, 2022; Collins, 2016, 2018; Donkor, 2013; Kudonu et al., 2021; Marfo, 2016; Obeng, 2015; Owusu-Poku, 2021) with no attention to health sustainability issues. The sensitivity and confidentiality of an individual's state of health are quite understandable; however, when the health begins to deteriorate, its sensitivity and confidentiality no longer matter to some

Ghanaian musicians. As a result, they come out openly to seek financial assistance. Therefore, I find my justification to be the health sustainability of the musician, which is inextricably linked to the sustainability of the music industry.

Method

The descriptive research design was used in this study's methodology. As Frankel and Wallen (2004) described, descriptive research entails examining the nature of interactions in real-world settings. In other words, the conclusions from the descriptive study are specific and not broad generalisations. The philosophical foundation of the qualitative or descriptive method is based on this discovery process. Anderson and Arsenault (2005) concurred that descriptive research lets researchers see items in their natural environment. In keeping with this, I used the descriptive research approach since it strongly emphasises bringing to the fore and comprehending health issues confronting popular musicians in Ghana recently. To this end, I conducted an online documentary search on prominent Ghanaian popular musicians who have declined in popularity recently using document analysis. According to Fischer (2006), document analysis is a systematic review or evaluation of printed and electronic documents. This instrument became appropriate because popular musicians' ailing and demise news is usually broadcast in print and electronic media, which gave me a fair idea of some musicians' present state. To be certain about the information I got from the online documentary search regarding popular musicians who are inactive due to ill health and those who have passed on, I then proceeded to the head office of the Musicians' Union of Ghana in Accra to verify whether the online search finding was authentic. To unravel the possible cause of death, I purposively sampled relatives and close friends of popular musicians who had passed away for an interview. As stated earlier, my goal was not to discover the actual cause of death, as this may be sensitive and involves an autopsy report. Instead, I attempted to find out the possible causes of death.

Results

Table 1: Some prominent veteran Ghanaian popular musicians passed on in the past decade.

S/N	Name of Musician	Aged	Year of Demise	Possible Cause of Demise
1.	Dr Paa Bobo	62	2013	Not known, but was ill for sometime
2.	P.K. Yamoag	86	2014	After a short illness
2.	Stan Plange	78	2015	Prostate cancer
3.	Kwadwo Donkoh	82	2016	Stroke
4.	Paapa Yankson	73	2017	Diabetes
5.	Ewurama Badu	72	2017	Not known, but was ill for sometime
6.	C.K. Mann	82	2018	Diabetes
7.	Jewel Ackah	73	2018	Diabetes
8.	Nana Tuffour	66	2020	Stroke
9.	Jesse Jones	61	2021	Not known
11.	Nana Ampadu	76	2021	Not known, but was ill for sometime
12.	A. B. Crentsil	79	2022	Stroke
13.	Kwadwo Akwaboah	60	2023	Not known, but after a short illness

Table 2: Some prominent young Ghanaian popular musicians passed on in the past decade.

S/N	Name of Musician	Image	Aged	Year of Demise	Possible Cause of Demise
1.	Ronnie Nii Quashikumah Quainoo (Ronnie Coches)	 <p>Image by peacefmonline.com</p>	36	2013	Cardiac Arrest
2.	Theophilus Tagoe (Castro)	 <p>Image by 3news.com</p>	32	2014	Accident (drowned)
3.	Daasebre Gyamena	 <p>Image by ghanaweb.com</p>	48	2016	Unknown, but after a short ailment
4.	Danny Nettey	 <p>Image by Joy 99.7 FM on Facebook</p>	47	2016	Unknown, but was suddenly unconscious
5.	George Forest	 <p>Image by peacefmonline.com</p>	46	2016	Pneumonia




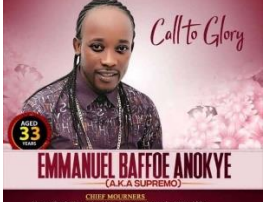
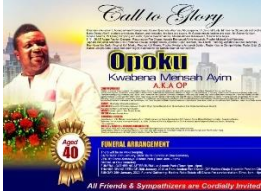

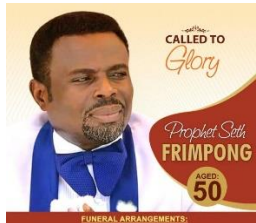
6.	Abraham Laryea		36	2016	Unknown, but after a short ailment
		Image from Abraham Laryea's Facebook page			
7.	Emmanuel Quayson (Vybrant Faya)		29	2016	Motor accident
		Image by ashaimanonline.com			
8.	Ebony Reigns		21	2018	Motor accident
		Image by ghanaweb.com			
9.	Emmanuel Baffoe Anokye (Supremo)		33	2019	Unknown, but suffered from a tumour in the head
		Image by yen.com.gh			
10.	Opoku Mensah Ayim (OPK)		40	2019	Unknown, but after a short ailment
		Image from Opoku Mensah Ayim's Facebook page			
11.	Kofi Boakye Yiadom (Kofi B)		45	2020	Cardiac Arrest

Image by
myjoyonline.com

12. Prophet Seth
Frimpong

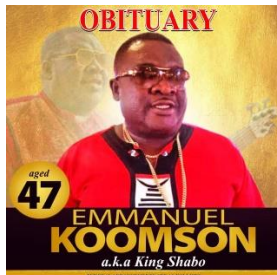


50 2020

Unknown, but
suffered from
a stroke for
some time

Image by
modernghana.com

13. Emmanuel
Koomson (King
Shabo)

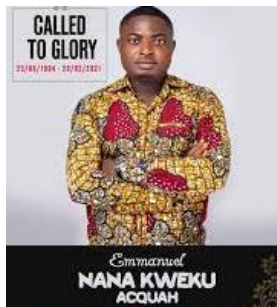


47 2021

Unknown, but
suffered from
a stroke for
some time

Image by
ghanaweekend.com

14. Emmanuel
Nana Kweku
Acquah (Tong)



27 2021

Kidney failure

Image by
ripghana.com

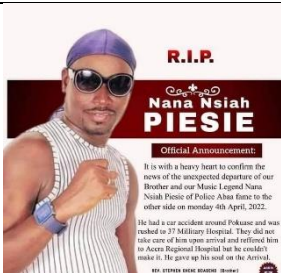



15. Fru Asa Atanga
(Colonel Faat)

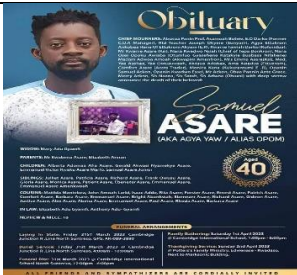



59 2022

Cancer

Image from Blay
Ambolley's Facebook
page

16.	Nana Nsiah Piesie		57	2022	Motor accident
		Image by ghanaweb.com			
17.	Rab Bakari		57	2022	Accident (drowned)
		Image by musicinafrica.net			
18.	Rev. Ferdinand Larbi Martinson		52	2022	Unknown, but was in a coma for some time
		Image from Larbi Martinson's Facebook page			
19.	Rev. Prince Nyarko		47	2022	Unknown, but after a short ailment
		Image from Rev. Prince Nyarko's Facebook page			

20.	Samuel Asare (Agya Yaw)		40	2023	Unknown, but was suddenly unconscious
Image from Agya Yaw's Facebook page					
21.	Mustapha Rahman (Rudebwoy Ranking)		32	2023	Unknown, but after a short ailment
Image by ghanaweb.com					

Discussion

In Table 2 above, five prominent musicians have had their music careers truncated through accidents and have passed on in the past decade. One is tempted to mention the names of Ebony Reigns, Nana Nsiah Piesie, Vybrant Faya (motor accident), Castro and Rab Bakri (drowning in water). This result also suggests that accident is not the most critical cause of truncating musicians' careers in Ghana. In contrast to accidents, more musicians have had their careers truncated in the past decades due to ill health. Also, they have passed on in some cases because of underlying health conditions, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. One may also argue that the musicians listed in Table 1 above were advanced in age (past 60 years); hence, the underlying health conditions are probably associated with old age, which is quite understandable and conforms to Ghana's 64 years of life expectancy. Moreover, some of them have had a five-decade career lifespan. It is worth stating that before their demise, some had been battling ailments and were incapacitated for years.

Surprisingly, a few veteran musicians like Koo Nimo, Pat Thomas, Gyedu-Blay Ambolley, Amakye Dede, Ben Brako and Bessa Simons are actively performing. However, others like

Ebo Taylor, Abrekyireba Kofi Sammy and Obuoba J.A. Adofo are inactive due to health-related issues. Moreover, these veteran musicians mentioned above have not less than five decades of career lifespan. The crux of the matter is the demise of much younger musicians in the past decade, as shown in Table 2 above. These musicians were below 60 and had underlying health conditions before their passing. I also want to acknowledge that some prominent musicians suspended their careers due to ill health but later recovered and resumed their careers. Notwithstanding, only a few found themselves in the above instance, and even with that, they could not reach their zenith. Charles Kojo Fosu, also known as Daddy Lumba, Yaw Sarpong and Hannah Marfo, are the few prominent musicians to have experienced a *comeback* in their music careers. Therefore, considering the discussion, it is instructive to note that ill health is the most critical cause of the truncation of musicians' careers in Ghana. As indicated in Table 2 above, kidney failure, stroke and cardiac arrest were some health issues resulting in young musicians' career truncation and demise.

One of the respondents, a relative of one of the musicians who has passed on, states in an interview that: *My brother, until his demise, was a habitual late-night eater because he was either at the recording studio or performing on stage until his kidney started failing in function.* Similarly, another respondent lamented that: *If my father had taken a break from his busy performance schedule, he would have been alive today.* Drawing on my experiences and other people's experiences as a musician in Ghana for the past two and a half decades, it is plausible to say that most musicians rarely pay attention to their diet and eating habits, especially during their peak seasons. Similarly, most musicians rarely have adequate rest in their quest to stay relevant in the music industry. It is instructive to note that music-making activities, such as studio recordings, church programmes, and live music events, are usually night activities in Ghana, which can run deep into the night. This situation, however, makes the musician susceptible to eating late at night if care is not taken. Surprisingly, some musicians eat whatever they might find without considering its health implications. In addition, it is usual for musicians to be engaged with performances consistently for weeks during their peak seasons, which sometimes compromises their rest. Therefore, consistently poor eating habits and inadequate rest make musicians in Ghana vulnerable to health-related issues.

Conclusion

The musical works of musicians are inarguably a source of inspiration and pleasure to many. Thus, the importance of their well-being (state of health) and the management of their musical career cannot be overemphasised. Unfortunately, some Ghanaian musicians have had a short musical career due to ill health. Hence, I conclude that the health sustainability of musicians is paramount to the sustainability of the music industry. More so, the musician can only meet the fundamental needs of the music industry, such as composing, recording and performing, so long as their health is intact. It is a truism that *health is wealth*, as it is generally believed. Therefore, I recommend that Ghanaian musicians prioritise their health as a matter of urgency in their quest for a sustainable career. To this end, Ghanaian musicians should be mindful of their diets concerning what, where, when, and how they eat. In addition, Ghanaian musicians should be selective in their day-to-day engagements and deliberately take time off their engagement schedules to rest. Finally, Ghanaian musicians should invest some of their earnings in their health for regular medical screening to detect career-threatening health-related issues early. For clarity, this study, based on its goals and scope, attempted to find out the possible causes of death among prominent young Ghanaian popular musicians in the past decade. Hence, future research should investigate the actual cause of death and what can be done to ameliorate the situation. Furthermore, the general lifestyle and career of veteran popular musicians in Ghana who have made over five decades of career lifespan should be investigated to serve as a roadmap for the younger ones.

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