

Bullying and Harassment in the Music Industry



“Completely entangled in its fabric”



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The findings highlight the endemic nature of bullying and harassment in the music industry and the need for change.

Introduction

In the past year addressing bullying and harassment in the music industry has become a key priority in the UK. Nonetheless, we know little about the prevalence, characteristics and impact of bullying and harassment on those working and involved in the industry.

Despite efforts to support social change and equality, the UK music industry continues to be dominated by white, heterosexual men; lacks regulation; and relies on informal, precarious working agreements (Black Lives in Music, 2021; Hennekam and Bennet, 2017; Hill, Hesmondhalgh and Megson, 2020). These factors create a ripe environment for bullying and harassment to thrive (Jones, 2018).

Prompted by media reports and anecdotal evidence, we identified the need for concrete evidence on these issues in the UK music industry. To address this need, we developed a survey to capture the current status of bullying and harassment in the wider UK music industry. In November of 2021, we launched this survey and received 574 responses.

The findings highlight the endemic nature of bullying and harassment in the music industry and the need for change. We believe that the experiences and views of those affected by bullying and harassment should be placed at the heart of future developments of policies and regulations. With this report we want to raise awareness about the extent to which bullying and harassment occurs and about the disproportionate prevalence among marginalised groups.

Key messages

Experiences of bullying & harassment

96% of respondents experienced bullying

99% of women and 93% of men who completed the survey were bullied

98% of survey participants with a disability were bullied

97% of survey participants who identified as a sexual minority were bullied

81% of respondents experienced harassment

96% women and 69% men who completed the survey were harassed

83% of survey participants with a disability were harassed

95% of survey participants who identified as a sexual minority were harassed

85% reported their experiences of bullying and harassment negatively impacted them

82% of women who experienced bullying and harassment experienced negative consequences whereas 48% of men did

Perpetrators

65% of respondents reported that the perpetrator was one man or multiple men.

19% of respondents described the perpetrator as one woman or multiple women.

55% reported the perpetrator had influence over their career



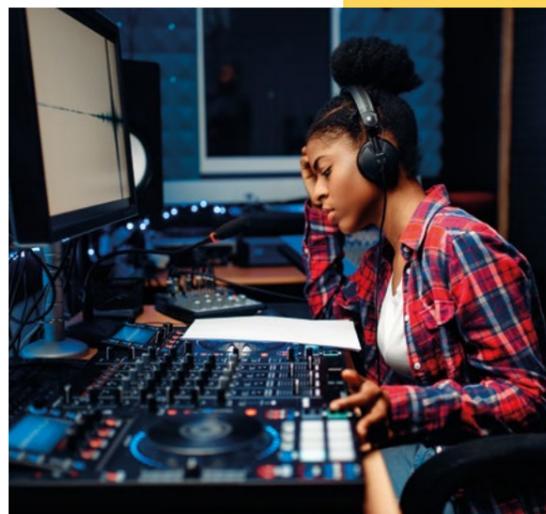
About the Project

There is little research on bullying and harassment in the music industry but we know that it happens and negatively impacts people involved in the industry.

A recent example includes the well-documented incident in which **Sam Matlock**, the vocalist for **Wargasm**, was physically assaulted by venue security (see *BBC, 2021*). Another example are the allegations of the employees of the promotions company **SSD** that the founder sexually harassed them and created a toxic work environment (*Beaumont-Thomas, 2021*). We do not know how many people involved in the UK music industry have been subjected to bullying and harassing behaviours or the impact of those experiences on their personal and professional lives. This research project was designed to provide insight into these issues.

Additionally, the project investigated how experiences may differ across different groups of people involved in the industry. We recognise that many forms

of discrimination such as sexism, racism, and ableism are prevalent in the UK music industry and may be influential on their own or in combination on experiences of bullying and harassment. *Black Lives in Music (2021)* found that 73% of Black music professionals experienced direct racism and Black, women professionals earned less money than White, women professionals. When asked about experiences of discrimination, Black women faced discrimination based on their race, gender, sexuality and disability. These findings highlight the importance of considering the experiences of marginalised groups and intersectional identities.



Methods

The research team was based at the **University of Winchester** and the **University of the West of Scotland (UWS)**. The UWS Creative Industries' Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for this research project which involved collecting data from people working in the UK music industry via focus groups, an online survey and follow-up interviews.

The BaHMI survey was adapted from the Equally Safe in Higher Education (ESHE) research toolkit (McCarry et al., 2018) and was informed by contributions collected from five focus groups which included people from diverse backgrounds who were involved in the UK music industry. They provided feedback on the wording and content of survey questions. This helped to ensure the relevance of this

work to the industry. After incorporating feedback from the focus groups, the survey was piloted and then run for 11 weeks from the 1st of November 2021.

The survey included five sections on:

1. **Demographics**
2. **Experiences of bullying and harassment**
3. **Impact of experiences**
4. **Disclosure and reporting**
5. **The cultural context of the UK music industry working environment.**

An open text box was included at the end for participants wishing to add comments.

The findings in this report are based on the analysis of our Bullying and Harassment in the Music Industry, or BaHMI, survey data.

Profile of Research Contributors

The survey drew responses from 574 participants, capturing quantitative and qualitative responses from a range of people working and involved with the UK music industry. The diverse representation of the participants highlighted the importance of considering intersectional aspects of bullying and harassment experiences.

The average age of participants was 38.6. Their ages ranged from 16 to 80. A little over half were men (54%) and 43% were women.¹ Over three-quarters of the survey respondents identified as straight (78%). The next most common sexual orientation was bisexual (9%) followed by other minoritised sexual identities (7%) and those preferring to not say (5%).

The ethnic profile of the survey participants showed that the majority identified as White (87%) and 13% as an ethnic minority. When asked about national identity, 81% reported their identity as British, English, Scottish, Welsh or North Irish.

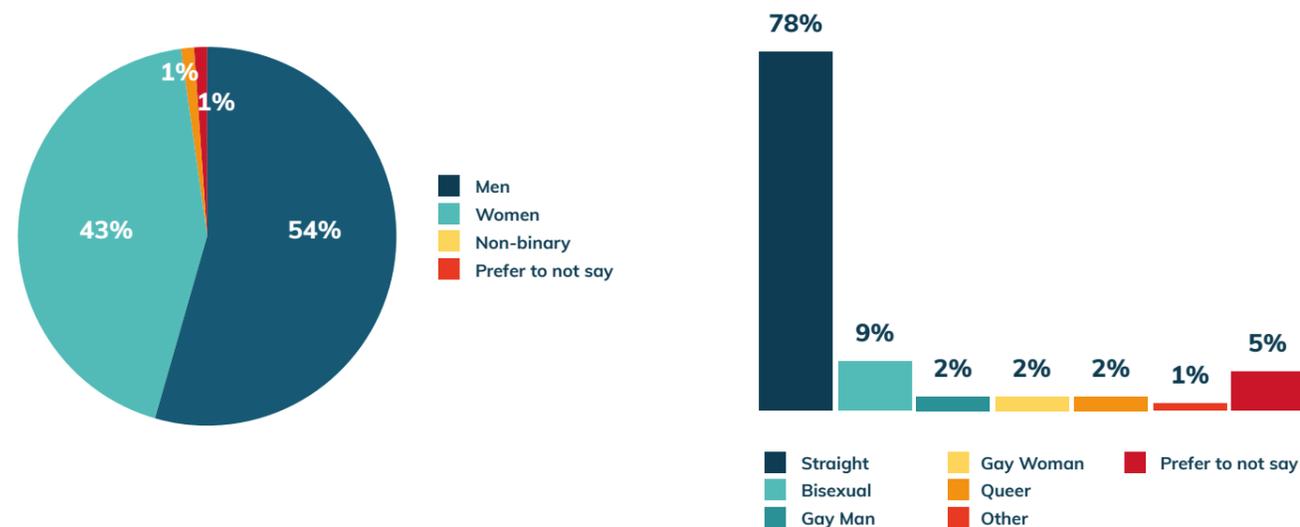
Nearly one in six of the respondents (16%) indicated they have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on their ability to carry out day to day activities.

On average, participants had been working in the UK music industry for 16 years and toured 4 months a year.

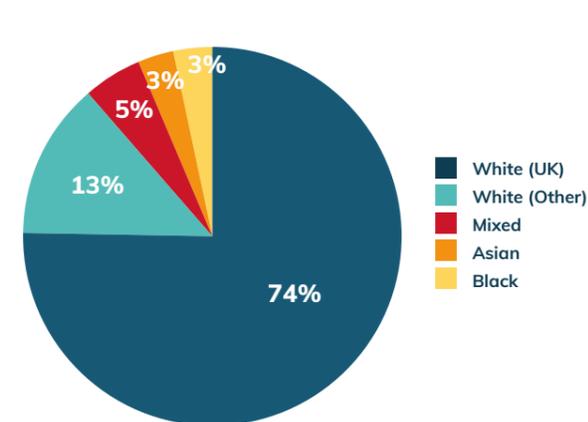


1. Survey participants were asked to identify their gender and to indicate if they identified as transgender. Twelve (2.1%) did. They were included in the analysis according to the gender identity. For example, if a survey participants reporting identified as a woman and as transgender, the analysis included them with participants who identified as women. This was done only for statistical purposes.

Gender



Ethnicity



The diverse representation of the participants highlighted the importance of considering intersectional aspects of bullying and harassment experiences.

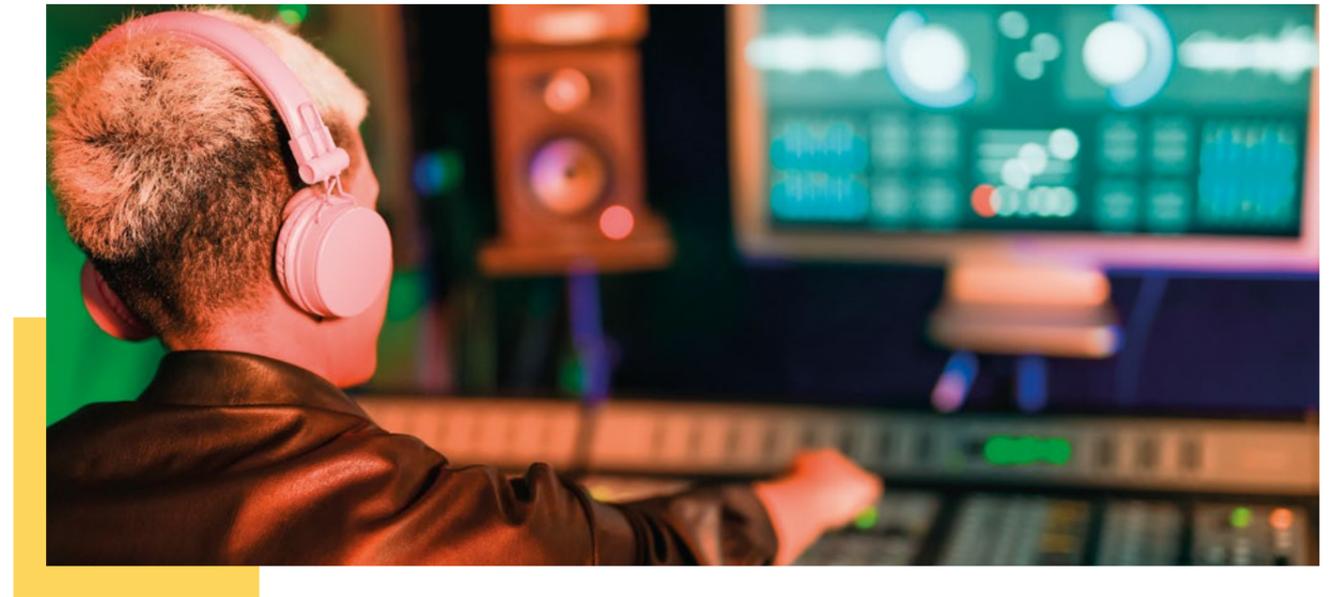
Survey participants were asked to describe the location of their work and their employment status. Over half of the survey respondents worked in the UK only (57%) and the remaining 43% worked in the UK and other countries.

The most frequently reported employment status was self-employed (44%). The next most common was employed (37%) and then self-employed with manager responsibilities (10%) and lastly in education (7%).

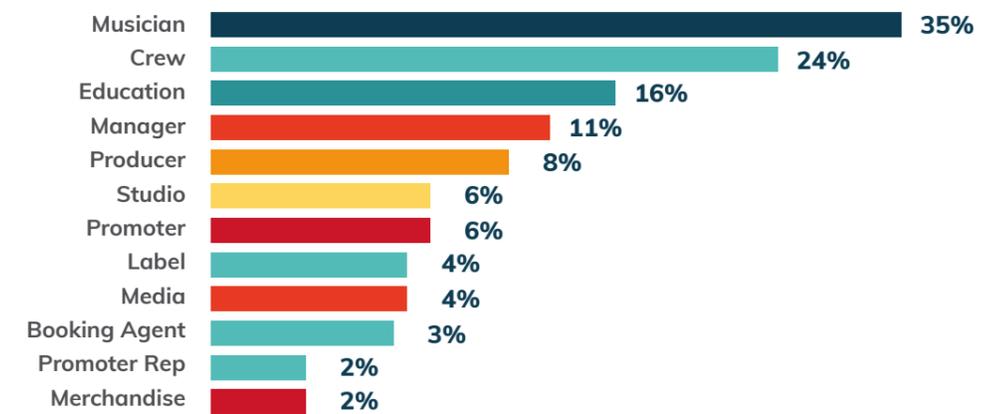
Participants described their three most common work spaces and job roles, as well as the three most frequent genres of music they work in. While a range of workspaces were identified, the most frequently reported were venues, desk based, studios and festivals.

Survey respondents had many different kinds of job roles. The most frequently reported were musician, crew and in education. Additional roles can be found in the chart opposite

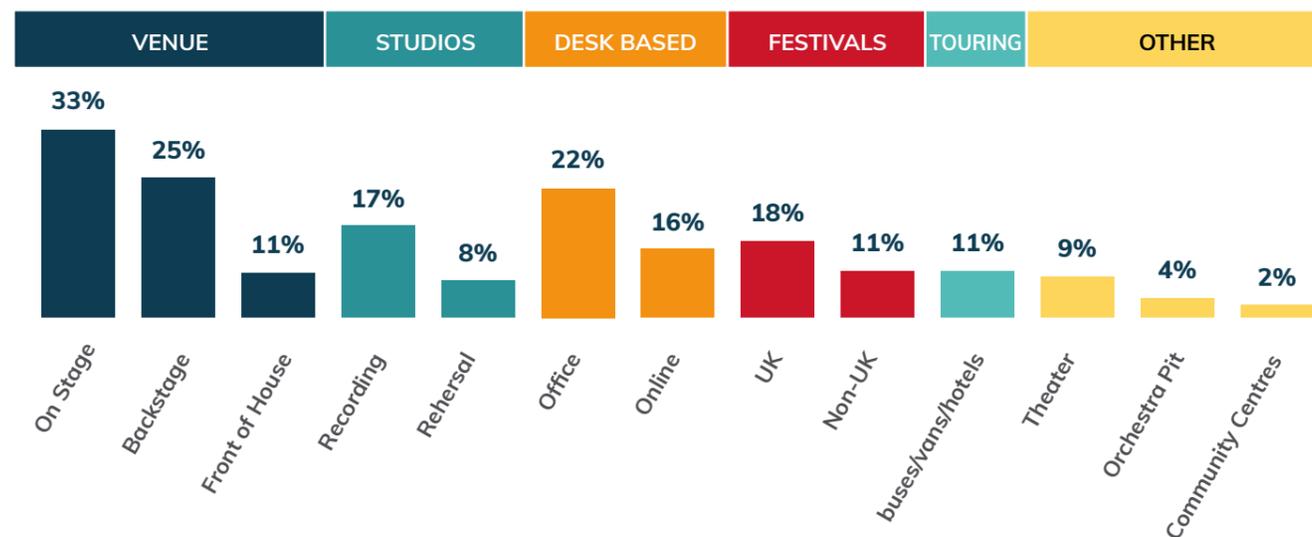
The music genres in which participants worked were diverse. The most common genres were pop, rock/punk and classical/neo-classical.



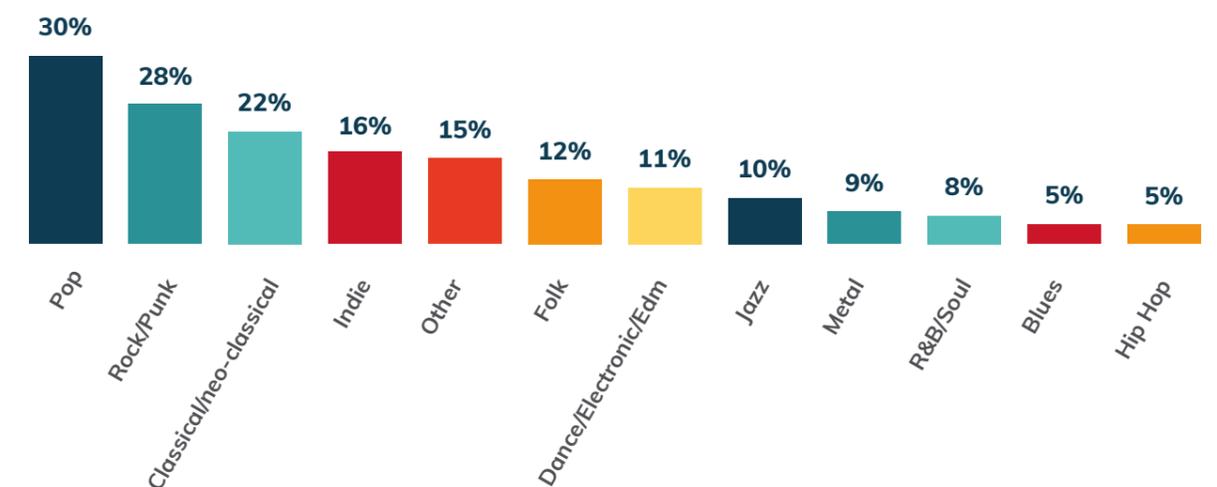
Primary Job Role(s)



Primary Work Space(s)



Primary Music Genre(s)



Experiences of Bullying and Harassment

The findings presented in the rest of the report are based on the information provided by 467 respondents. Participants reported how frequently they experienced a range of bullying behaviours while involved in the UK music industry. The most common kind of bullying experienced was being undermined in work related discussions (81%) and humiliation or ridicule in connection with work (76%). It is important to note that while physical violence and a threats of physical violence were the least common to be reported by respondents, more than one-third (35%) experienced the former and approximately one-fifth (21%) experienced the latter.

Undermining in work related discussions.....	81%	Invasion of your personal space	66%
Humiliation or ridicule in connection to work.....	76%	Being stared at in a hostile way	63%
Pressured to work in certain ways to ensure future work, e.g. play or work certain gigs, work for less money	74%	Persistent criticism about your work (including your creative outputs)	62%
Insulting or offensive remarks made by colleagues about you	70%	Hints or signals from others that you should quit working in the music industries	48%
Gossip or rumours spread about you by someone you work with	68%	Experienced physical violence	35%
		Threatened with physical violence	21%

After examining the prevalence of bullying among women and men, the analysis focused on the prevalence of bullying among different groups. We looked at ethnicity first. The findings showed that 96% of survey participants who identified as white and 92% of participants who identified as an ethnic minority were subjected to bullying.

The findings on ethnicity should be taken with extreme caution. The number of survey participants who identified as an ethnic minority was small, which means the findings

should not be considered representative of ethnic minorities involved in the UK music industry. For an in-depth analysis, see the report by Black Lives in Music (2021).

We then examined disability and sexuality. 98% of survey participants who reported a disability experienced bullying. All women in this study who had a disability (100%) were subjected to bullying, as did 97% of men with a disability.

95% of respondents who identified as straight experienced bullying and 97% of respondents who identified as a sexual minority were bullied.

Respondents described how frequently they were subjected to forms of harassment while involved in the UK music industry. Behaviours they were subjected to range from sexist and sexualised remarks to sending unwanted sexual photos/videos to sexual coercion and forced sex/rape.

Further analysis of the prevalence of harassment focused on ethnicity, disability and sexuality. The findings suggested that ethnicity did not influence harassment, with 81% of participants who identified as white and 81% of participants who identified as an ethnic minority were harassed. As stated above, this result should be considered with extreme caution due to the small number of survey participants who identified as an ethnic minority.

Sexist remarks made to you	53%	Offered a career benefit for sexual cooperation	17%
Unwanted sexual remarks made to you	53%	Experienced negative career impact for refusing sexual cooperation	16%
Being stared at in a sexualised/objectified way	49%	Made you do something sexual when you were intoxicated with drinks and/or drugs	16%
Unwanted sexual remarks made about you.....	47%	Sent unwanted sexual photos/videos by colleague ..	15%
Sexist remarks made about you.....	46%	Forced, or threatened with force, to do something sexual you did not want to	9%
Unwanted sexual attention by a colleague	45%	Sent unwanted sexual photos/videos by a fan	8%
Unwanted questions about sexuality	39%		
Unwanted sexual attention by a fan	30%		
Pressured to do something sexual when you didn't want to	19%		

83% of respondents with a disability were subjected to harassment. Nearly all women in this study who had a disability (98%) and two-thirds of men with a disability were harassed.

Nearly all participants who identified as a sexual minority (95%) experienced harassment and more than three-quarters (77%) of participants who identified as straight were harassed.

94% of survey respondents who identified as a woman and straight and 66% of survey respondents who identified as a man and straight were subjected to harassment.

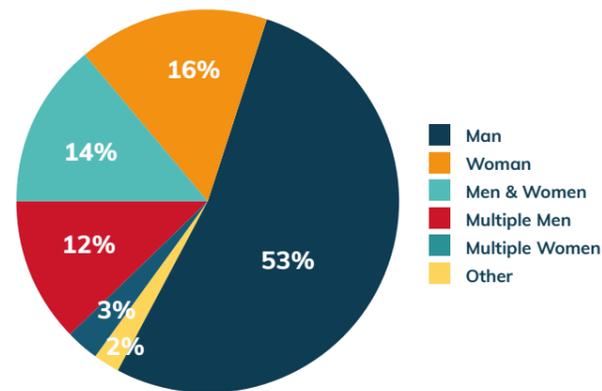
100% of participants who identified as a woman and a sexual minority and 87% of participants who identified as a man and a sexual minority were harassed.



Perpetrators

If survey participants indicated they had experienced bullying and/or harassment, they were asked to describe the perpetrator(s) of their most recent experience. Men comprised the majority of perpetrators, with nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents reporting that the perpetrator was one man or multiple men. Nearly one-fifth (19%) described the perpetrator as one woman or multiple women.

Thinking about your most recent experiences, was the person(s) responsible



Participants also reported that more than half of perpetrators (55%) had influence over their career. Comments from one respondent suggested that many experience bullying perpetrated by those with power and influence:

Have had numerous situations of being bullied by male bosses. Numerous times watched colleagues get bullied. Basically made to feel like you have to accept it because they're so influential [and] can help your career. My love for working in music has dwindled over the years and have considered leaving before I stop loving music. Actually was forced to leave on one occasion for the sake of my mental health.



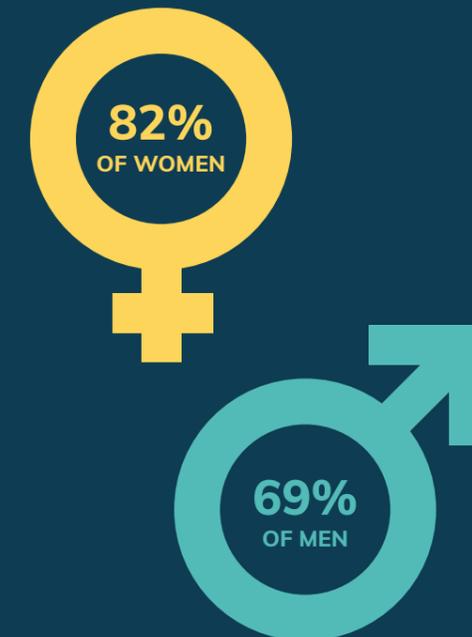
Impact of Bullying and Harassment

The survey findings indicated that bullying and harassing behaviours impacted the vast majority of participants' personal and professional lives. 85% of participants reported they experienced negative consequences. The most common kind of impact was negatively affecting mental health (55%) and choosing to never work with the person(s) responsible again (45%).

Negatively affected mental health.....	55%	Negatively affected personal relationships.....	32%
Chose to never work with the person(s) responsible again.....	45%	Took time off from working in the music industry.....	22%
Negatively affected professional relationships.....	42%	Affected you in other ways.....	21%
Negatively affected career development.....	35%	Changed your job role in the music industry.....	15%
		Stopped working in the music industry.....	6%

82% of women reported in the survey that their experiences of bullying and harassment negatively impacted them.

This is in comparison to **48% of men** who reported a negative impact.



Survey participants described in more depth the consequences of bullying, discussing the impact it had on their mental health and career.

Bullying by one colleague caused stress resulting in serious ill health & loss of long term job.

The bullying I suffered over a [long] period from one tour manager and his wife resulted in my first attempt in taking my own life ... the artists managers attempt to stop me working has caused two other failed suicide attempts. This still continues to this day.

Reporting and Disclosures

Respondents who experienced bullying and or harassment were asked if they disclosed their experiences to anyone. Approximately three in five respondents (63%) told someone. The most common person they disclosed to was a friend (37%) or colleague (34%). Following these sources of support, the next most frequent was a partner (23%), family member (18%), other (8%), Union (4%) and support organisation, such as Help Musicians or Music support (3%).

Participants subjected to bullying and or harassment also described if they made an official report. Only 13% did so. When they did, they made the report to their line manager (6%), employer (5%), police (2%), other official organisation (2%), Union (2%), and other (2%).

A few explained why they did not make official reports. For one survey respondent, there was no one to report to and for another, there was a lack of trust in the reporting processes.

The issues I had were with my bosses, so I had no one I could report it to, or any way to stand up for myself. Eventually I found a new job, but for months I was crying daily after work.

I don't have trust in my line manager, my boss, my HR department. The union is great, but internally, nothing ever changes to help employees have a voice.

One said that his gender was an obstacle to reporting.

It is difficult reporting bullying as a man, because few line managers will believe you, and colleagues don't want to know.

Survey respondents described a range of outcomes following their official reports. Approximately half (48%) reported that nothing happened after they made their report. For those who did experience an outcome, 40% said their career was negatively impacted. This is in contrast to a negative career impact on only 15% of the person(s) responsible.

Considering these findings, it comes as no surprise that 73% of survey participants said there were not satisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the outcome of their official report. Only 16% were somewhat satisfied or satisfied.

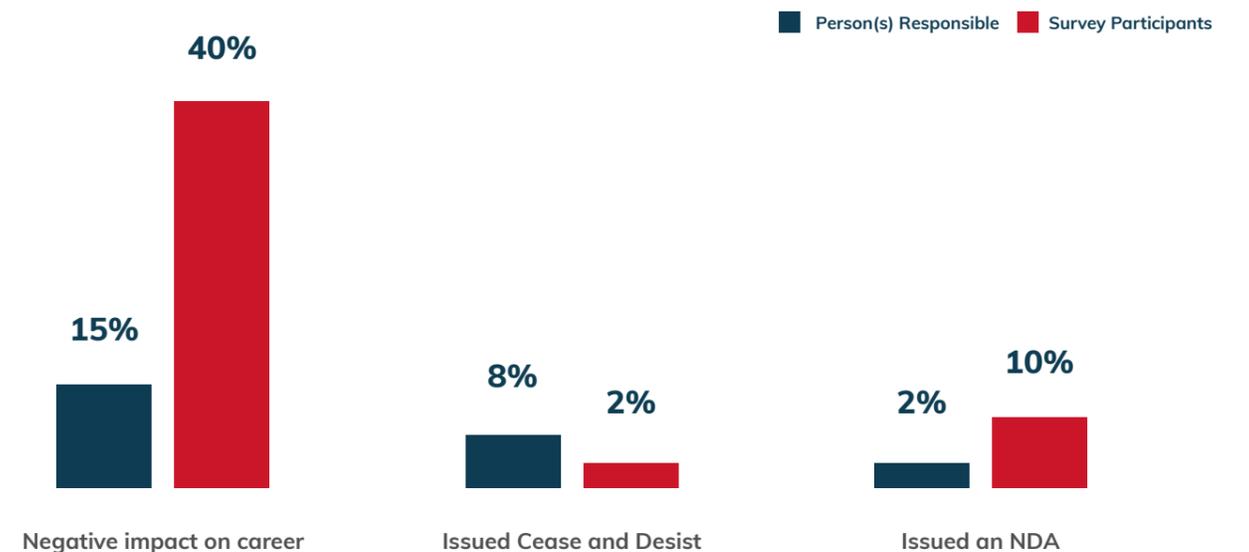


One participant explained why they were not satisfied and how freelancers have fewer options to address unsatisfactory outcomes.

There's really very little opportunity to do anything about the experience you have, as freelancers we're reliant on working networks and reputation, so have to manage situations carefully. I left an employed role where I experienced bullying for several years, after making a complaint to the CEO and Board of Trustees. I could have sued them for wrongful dismissal or bullying in the workplace but the industry is small and I am trying to develop my career. The organisation did nothing about my complaint, and so that person continues in that job, is treating my replacement in the same way, and I'm gaslighted into being told that it wasn't malicious and wasn't harmful to me.



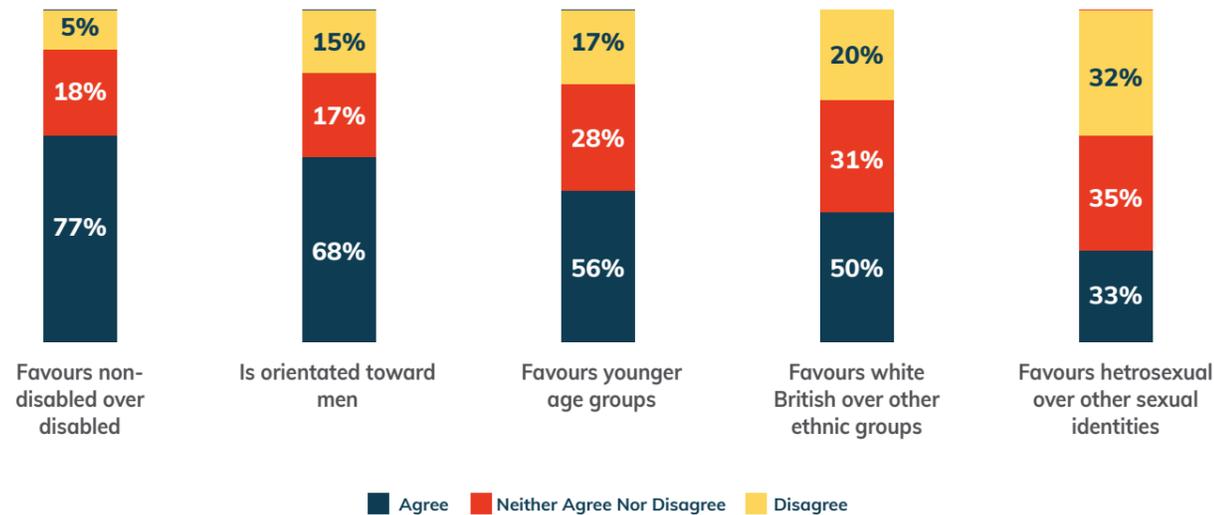
Outcome(s) of Official Report



UK Music Industry Working Culture

Survey respondents indicated how much they agreed with different statements about the UK music industry working culture. The majority of participants agreed that the music industry favours non-disabled (77%) and younger age groups (56%) and is orientated toward men (68%). Half agreed that the UK music industry favours White British over other ethnic groups.

The UK Music Industry



Two participants provided further insight into these findings. One commented on the sexist power dynamics in their working environment and the other described how embedded discrimination is in the wide UK music industry.

“I’ve observed many powerful white men wanting to work only with women at subordinate level.”

“The music industry is misogynistic bullying and racist entity. It’s difficult to tackle or even talk about because it’s so ingrained.”

The majority of those who completed the survey thought that bullying and sexual harassments are problems in the music industry, with nearly eight in ten (77%) agreeing

bullying is a problem and seven in ten (71%) agreeing that sexual harassment is a problem.

One survey respondent shared their view that bullying and harassment are embedded in the industry.

“Harassment and bullying are PART of the music industry- completely tangled in its fabric.”

While the majority thought there should be formal regulations tackling bullying and harassment in their work environment (91%) and across the entire UK music industry (82%), a few survey participants did not think regulations would be effective. Eight in ten participants (80%) were not aware of any music industry policies on these issues.



“I have worked for a very large company who did introduce a code for bullying and harassment. An official route for reporting. It makes no difference.... I went through official route. Investigation found the staff member to be guilty of harassment and assault and theft. They make recommendations to employer for disciplinary action. Left again to the discretion of the person’s manager. No action taken. Promotion given. sadly these official regulations once in place ar[e] only on paper.”

Respondents proposed different measures to address bullying and harassment, with one suggesting a change in attitudes and another suggesting an external HR service.

“As most of the industry is self employed formal regulations aren’t really going to do much it’s got to come from peer pressure.”

“I think it should be a requirement for all music industry professionals/companies to have access to an external HR service. The label where I was bullied at by the general manager was my first proper full time job in music after graduating from university, and they didn’t even have a HR team, so I felt like I had no option but to just endure it, which had an awful effect on my mental health at the time and hugely knocked my confidence. Something I am still trying to fix to this day.”



Conclusion

This report shows that being subjected to bullying and harassment is the rule rather than the exception when involved in the UK music industry. Nearly 100% of survey respondents reported being subjected to bullying or harassment or both. This is a strong call to action that more must be done to tackle these issues.

We regard this report as an important contribution to building the evidence base on bullying and harassment in the UK music industry. The research findings presented here provide insight into some people's experiences of working in the UK music industry and the ongoing impact of bullying and harassment. Structural inequalities and biases based on gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and age remain prevalent and provide a context that can facilitate and normalise these behaviours. As a workplace, the UK music industry has as responsibility to change discriminatory attitudes and tolerance of bullying and harassment.

The Bullying and Harassment in the Music Industry (BaHMI) project offers a significant opportunity to pioneer vital work needed to ensure that the UK music industry is among the safest in the world. These findings provide a starting point for informing strategic responses to bullying and harassment. One key part of carrying this work forward is additional research to further develop understanding of bullying and harassment, its impact, and how the industry should respond. Following the release of this report, the BaHMI research team will interview UK music industry stakeholders to gather views on the next steps for the project and for the industry.

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