

**WOMEN IN
THEATRE**

SURVEY

Women in Theatre

Survey Update

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Introduction and Executive Summary

The Women in Theatre Survey update provides an update to the Women in Theatre Survey from 2021.

The Women in Theatre Survey was a major survey in 2021 partnered by Sphinx Theatre, University Women in the Arts, Equity, The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, ERA 50:50, the December Group and Stage Directors' UK and funded by Arts Council England.

This update has been overseen by Sphinx Theatre and seeks to discover whether women in theatre are still being impacted from the pandemic, building on the previous survey's finding that over 60% of women in theatre were considering leaving working in theatre.

Key findings include

- Only 6% of respondents believe there has been an increase in opportunities for women in theatre. This is despite research finding that women were in need of increased support post-pandemic (Adams-Prassl et al, 2020, at the University of Cambridge) and other countries such as Australia providing increased post-pandemic support. This suggests that the UK and the arts have not taken the action that was recommended and which other countries have pursued.
- 84% of women in theatre would like to see specific funding to support women in theatre post-pandemic.
- 75% of women in theatre would like to see childcare support.
- 68% would like to see specific programmes to support women in theatre.
- 63% would like to see policy changes to support women in theatre, for example by Arts Council England.
- 84% of women in theatre are still being impacted by the pandemic.

This report makes the following recommendations based on the report's findings:

• Policy changes

For Arts Council England and the UK government to make policy changes to better support women in theatre and women generally post pandemic. This recommendation is based on this report's findings of a desire for policy change and also an urgent need in terms of 84% of women still being impacted by the effects of the pandemic.

• Childcare support

For Arts Council England and UK theatres to consider how better to support childcare responsibilities. This recommendation is based on the repeated finding in this survey that one of the key areas women require support on is in terms of this area.

• Funding to support women in theatre

84% of women in theatre would like to see funding to support women in theatre - this theme is also recurrent throughout the survey and, as such, we recommend Arts Council England and the DCMS take measures to provide specific funding to support women in theatre and address gender inequality in theatre.

• Programmes to support women in theatre

This survey has repeatedly found a desire for programmes specifically aimed at supporting women in theatre and a need for these programmes. As such, we recommend Arts Council England, the DCMS and UK theatres consider how best to implement this recommendation.

This survey used closed and open questions, inspired by the effective use of this approach in studies such as Professor Dawn Bennett's research on women and arts careers in Australia. The survey also has a 95% confidence level and 8% margin of error, meaning we can be confident findings would be similar were all women in theatre to be surveyed. Findings indicate that action has not been taken post pandemic and that action urgently needs to be taken.

We call on the UK government, Arts Council England, theatres and other policymakers to take action based on this and the previous Women in Theatre Survey findings.

To quote Artistic Director of Sphinx Theatre, Sue Parrish, our question is now "how much more proof do they need?" - we hope this report, combined with the four reports I have authored for Sphinx Theatre over the last five years - an update to Sphinx's

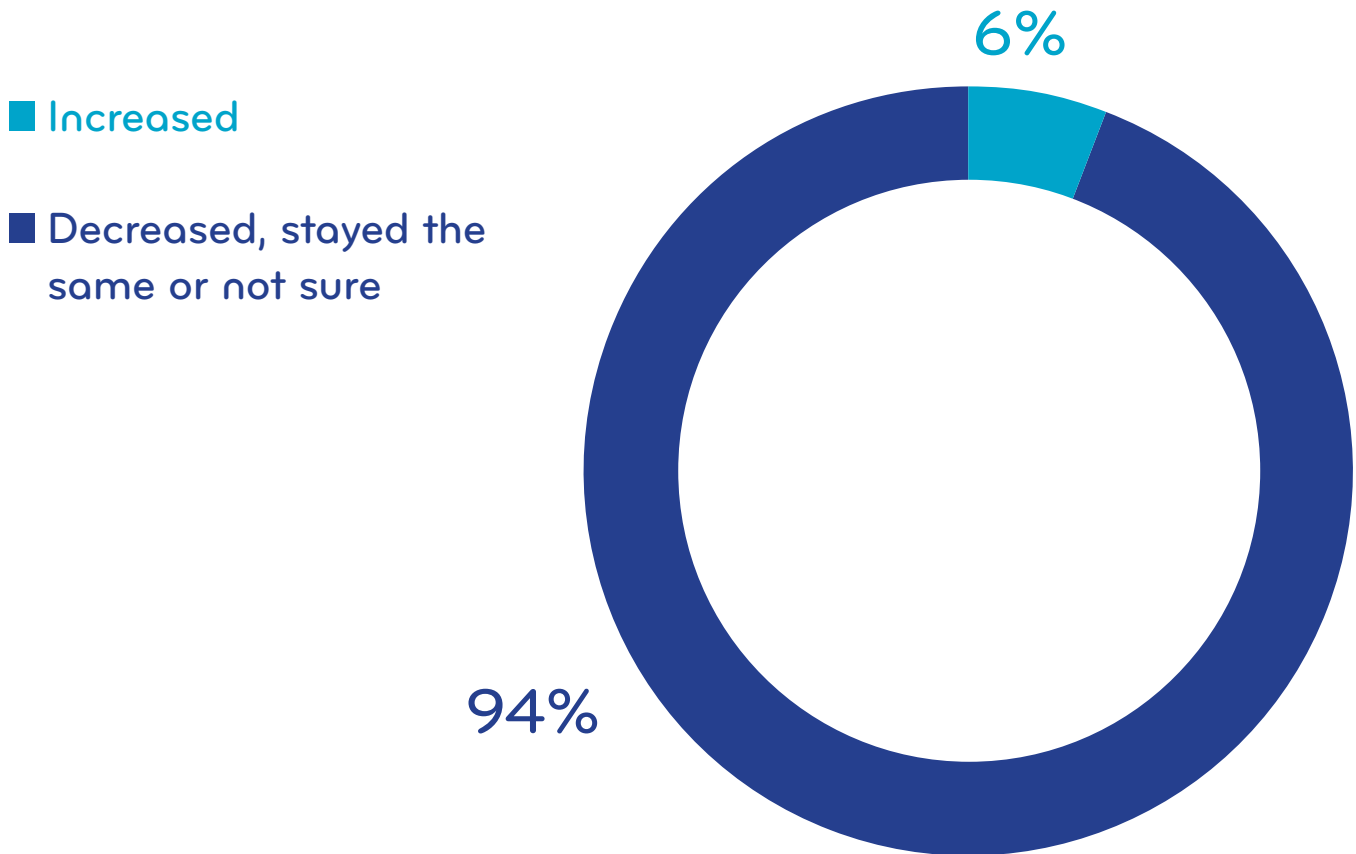
legendary "What Share of the Cake?" report, the Women in Theatre Forum Report, which brought together for the first time the most recent leading research on women in theatre from The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, ERA 50:50, University Women in the Arts, PIPA, Black Womxn in Theatre and Sphinx, and the Women in Theatre Survey - provide enough evidence for action to be taken now.

JENNIFER TUCKETT

Research and Literary Director (and academic at universities including Cambridge and Yale)
Sphinx Theatre

Evidence One

Only 5.84% of respondents felt opportunities for women in theatre have increased.



Evidence Two

Key themes in terms of why respondents feel opportunities for women have not increased, which have been identified via a process of coding, include:

2.1 Issues of risk

Quotes from respondents on risk include:

“The arts are under increasing pressure and financial difficulty, which makes everyone more risk averse, and there’s a larger proportion of ‘safe’ established writers who are male. Also, the Arts Council’s focus on community involvement in projects means that there’s less money in general for more traditional theatre in general, i.e. writing a play, hiring actors and a theatre space and putting it on.”

“I think theatres are playing safe in their programming and wooing audiences back with known plays, which, historically have been written by men and include more male parts.”

“Theatres taking fewer risks (female playwrights seen as more risky; more revivals of the same old male work); fewer new plays being commissioned overall.”

“Male writers considered sure bet when it comes to producing new work: women and enbies seen as risky and theatres are more scared about their reserves, funding, audiences. So they take fewer risks.”

2.2 Impact of the pandemic:

“Pay and conditions have been worse since pandemic. Union variation agreements were in force until August. Hours have been long for those working due to recruitment issues making (things hard) for parents and carers.”

“Harder to work (especially theatre hours) with increased responsibilities caused by covid etc.”

“Personally, I think the issue of being a working parent has not been fully addressed. I still rely on the understanding of the company/producer when I need to take time away for child care. I think there was a lot of talk during the pandemic about how to have longer lead in times, slow touring etc. but I have not actually seen this happening yet.”

“I thought there was some momentum behind the push for gender equality prior to the pandemic, but I think that has been replaced by other agendas, particularly ‘levelling up’.

“Everybody’s is still at capacity, funding, women having to leave due to caring responsibilities & lack of flexibility in the industry.”

2.3 Less opportunities in theatre:

“There’s a decrease generally - and with fewer writer commissions to go round theatres tend to stick with writers they already work with, and that means more men than women.”

“I’ve been that busy working to keep afloat (mainly teaching and community engagement rather than writing scripts) that I haven’t had the headspace to pursue writing work. I earn less now for daily freelance rate than I did fifteen years ago.”

“On a personal level the changes the pandemic brought have given me better opportunities in my career, but they have all been geared towards TV. I am doing this survey as I still consider myself a theatre worker, despite not having actually worked in one for over 3 years.”

“Overall opportunities for producing new work have decreased. Women tend to be commissioned less than men, and their work is ‘lower prestige’. So they are the first to be culled.”

“Decrease for everyone overall, which disproportionately affects marginalised groups. Theatres close off their networks, afraid to take risks, and fall back on the ‘old boys’ network.’ Not to mention the added difficulty of childcare and repeated illness that makes it harder and harder to take care of children and hold down a career!”

2.4 Less opportunities for women:

“Opportunities for women doesn’t seem to have been a priority for the theatre sector despite Me Too etc. highlighting patriarchal structures that exist in the industry.”

“Decrease in opportunities overall; disproportionate impact of childcare issues and costs; lack of recognition that women can manage leadership positions. Others holding onto positions stifling movement.”

“Everything has got harder; women always have fewer opportunities so as the climate has got harder, women’s opportunities narrow even more.”

“Because theatres don’t want to take risks and only want to commission/produce classics/proven hits, or new writing only from very famous playwrights. And there aren’t too many very famous playwrights who are women.”

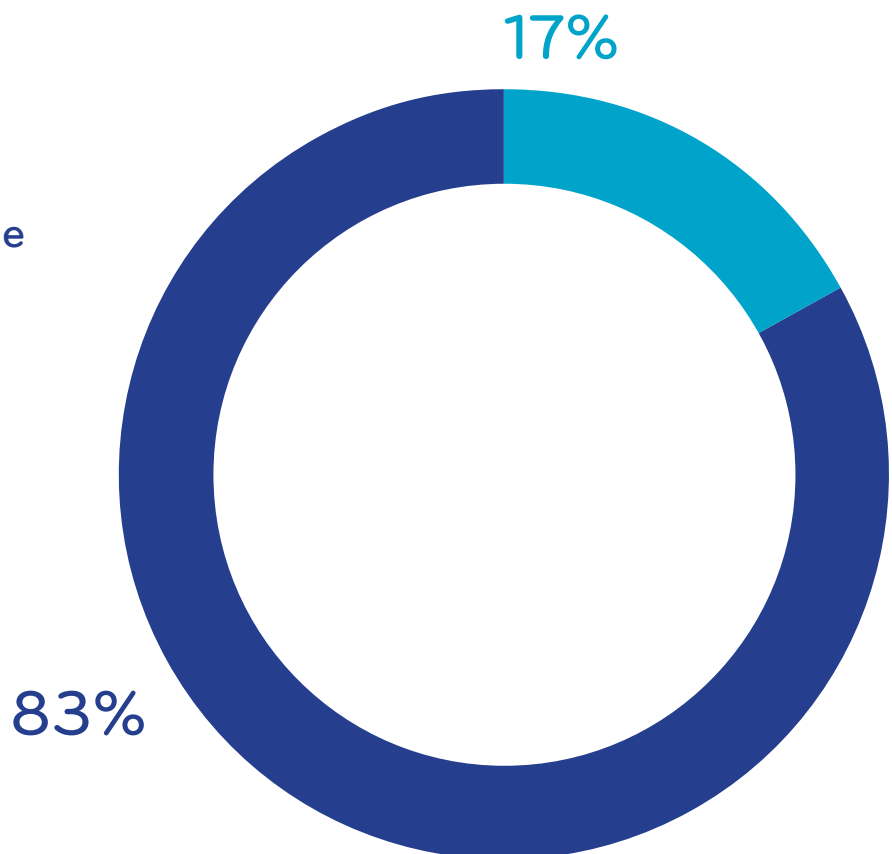
Evidence Three

Only 16.77% of respondents felt there had been an increase in support for women post pandemic (for example childcare, mentoring, development programmes, specific funding, policy changes).

This is despite research such as the original Women in Theatre Survey and University of Cambridge's research into the pandemic repeatedly finding women needed increased support post-pandemic as one of the two hardest hit groups by the pandemic (Adams-Prassl et al, 2020).

■ Increased

■ Decreased, stayed the same or not sure



Evidence Four

Key themes in terms of reasons why respondents felt there had not been an increase in support included:

4.1 Childcare issues continue to be ignored

“Nothing has changed. Still childcare is not included as an access need. And there’s no funding for parents who work in the arts. How are you supposed to work if we don’t have the means for childcare?”

“Always terrible and never getting any better. I took my daughter into a meeting at a theatre and they were clearly disgusted. But they called it on my day with her and I felt like I had no choice.”

“I always thought there should be affordable childcare for people who work outside 9 to 5. It genuinely astonishes me how places like the west end don’t have a dedicated childcare service for theatre performers and backstage workers.”

4.2 Continued male dominated industry:

“I have found it very hard to persuade theatres to consider job sharing / part time and flexible working practices especially in higher level technical roles. I have found the interview room is always 3 white males. Unpaid leave requests have been turned down as roles hard to cover.”

“Working class women attempting to work professionally as playwrights in theatre become that exhausted it is then hard to plan and progress.”

“Unconscious bias.”

“Show must go on mentality means that logistical issues such as those stated above are left behind because producers are too concerned with making money, many workspaces are male dominated which leaves a hole in the understanding even though women are empowered more to talk about these issues but men aren’t educated (in this area) so no change will come until they understand the issues we are facing.”

4.3 A worsening situation due to financial pressures

“I’ve experienced theatre companies being cut throat with their commissioning for the first time in my career. The financial pressures companies are under seems to be making some companies want more for their money with their commission. I find that this means a reduction in general support for writer and I suspect accommodating caring responsibilities has moved to low priority.”

“Less staff, so less opportunity to support initiatives to increase supportive working processes”

“Can’t speak on childcare (I don’t think you can decrease what wasn’t there in the first place) but a lot of artist opps in general have dwindled and the remaining ones are hyper competitive now.”

4.4 Not following through on pandemic promises:

“Lots of talk after pandemic but no action.”

“Seen lots of chat about it during and after pandemic, seen no real action. Mostly a squeeze on funding.”

“Lack of funding is certainly an issue but it does feel like we’ve stepped back even further in the last year.”

4.5 Access issues:

“If it has got better, Comms haven’t communicated extra support successfully to me. I’ve only just realised ACE can provide access support for mental health issues - and I’ve been getting ACE grants for about the same amount of time I’ve had bipolar disorder! Comms in general for access issues could be a lot better.”

“I think again, a lot of companies are trying to be more understanding. However, out of 10 projects I have worked on in the last year, only one of the producers sent me an access rider. In this it asked me to tell them how they can help/support me to do my job.”

“Arts council culling at NPO of many support organisations.”

“If this does exist then the information for it is not very accessible / easy to find.”

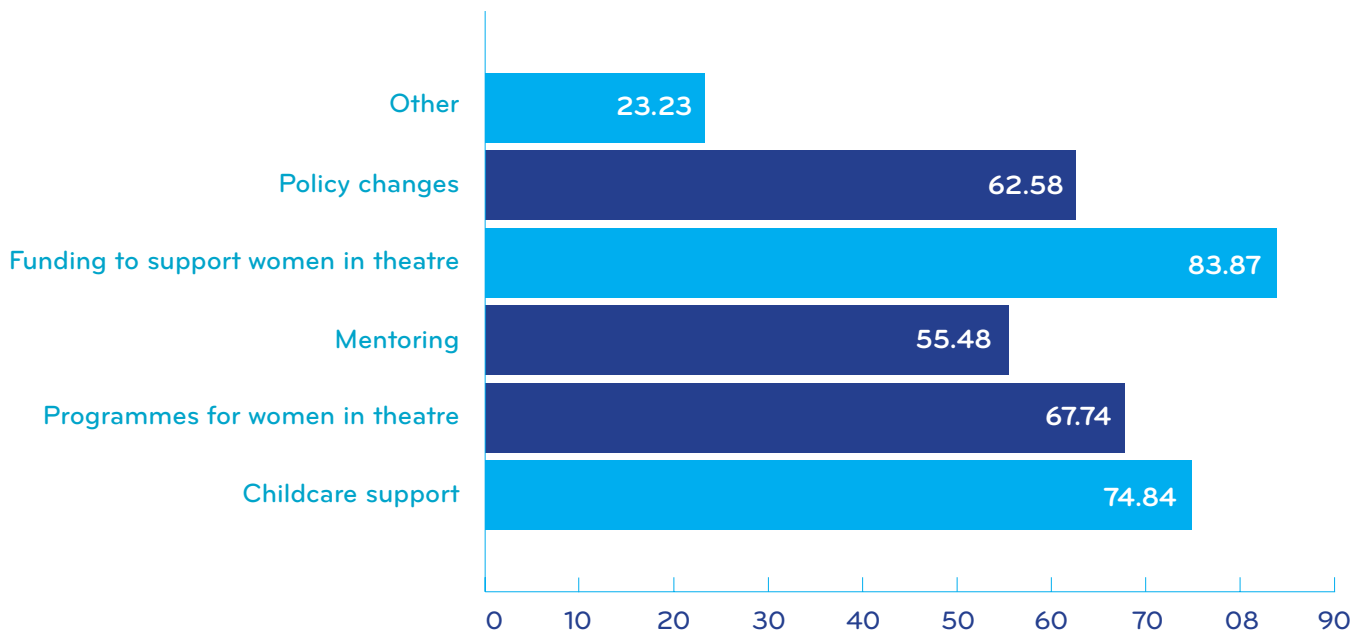
Evidence Five

The most popular form of support to support women post pandemic was funding to support women in theatre which was selected by 84% of respondents.

75% of respondents would like to see childcare support to support women post pandemic.

68% would like to see programmes to support women in theatre (for example, writing, directing, acting, producing):

■ Desired forms of support



Evidence Six

In terms of why respondents have selected these forms of support for women in theatre, key themes identified via a process of coding were:

6.1 Women face particular continued challenges:

“Often women have personal as well as professional barriers to pursue artistic careers. Mentoring in particular is a strong approach for individual development across roles.”

“It is really hard to juggle child care and caring responsibilities - bespoke programmes and better funding and more opportunities for women are crucial.”

6.2 Gender inequality continues to exist in theatre:

“Childcare should never be a barrier. Mentoring would be something I feel I would personally benefit from. We are still redressing the gender imbalance on and off our stages.”

“It’s not a lack of talent, it’s a lack of support for women in the systems that is the problem. It’s the lack of long term career development.”

“As someone who runs an anti-ageist female-led theatre company, I’m shocked at the lack of support in that area when it comes to funding, programming and career entry. That said, it seems like there’s (still) not enough support for women in the industry in general.”

6.3 Changes in workplace practices are needed

“Retention of workforce is a key issue, supporting staff better with their needs. Not seeing it as an issue if they can’t do 60 hour weeks and work both days at the weekend. With 7 day opening becoming the norm, staffing methods have to change.”

6.4 The lack of funding in theatre needs to be addressed

“Funding is the single most important driver of participation in any art form. No £££, no participation. Childcare is the thing that makes parental participation in any workforce possible.”

“Because I am only hanging on in here by a thread. I’ve been looking for longer term non-arts related jobs rather than struggle on - and I’m considered relatively successful!”

6.5 Childcare impact

“Since having a child, and with another on the way, my salary is less than half of what I was able to earn without care responsibilities. This makes it very difficult to pay for childcare and go back to work more regularly as a freelancer.”

“Like any sector - in order to support women and people with caring responsibilities to be able to work /encourage them back to work, we have to recognise the significant financial strain of childcare costs in this country. Particularly in the arts where salaries are often lower and there are more freelancers where income is not enough to cover childcare costs. Women are statistically more likely to be the primary carer and so there is also the issue of career opportunities being ‘lost’ due to extended leave or because you can’t get childcare. Fundamentally there needs to be policy changes in government and more funding to enable small and independent organisations to support women.”

6.6 Policy changes are needed

“If you’re a freelancer most of your money is taken up by childcare yet you can’t put that on your Arts Council application. Honestly the whole system is set up to support men.”

“Because if these policies are not in place people will revert to the status quo.”

“Money and quotas are the only way to force change; it won’t happen on its own.”

“Policy changes are particularly important as that will lead to all the other areas.”

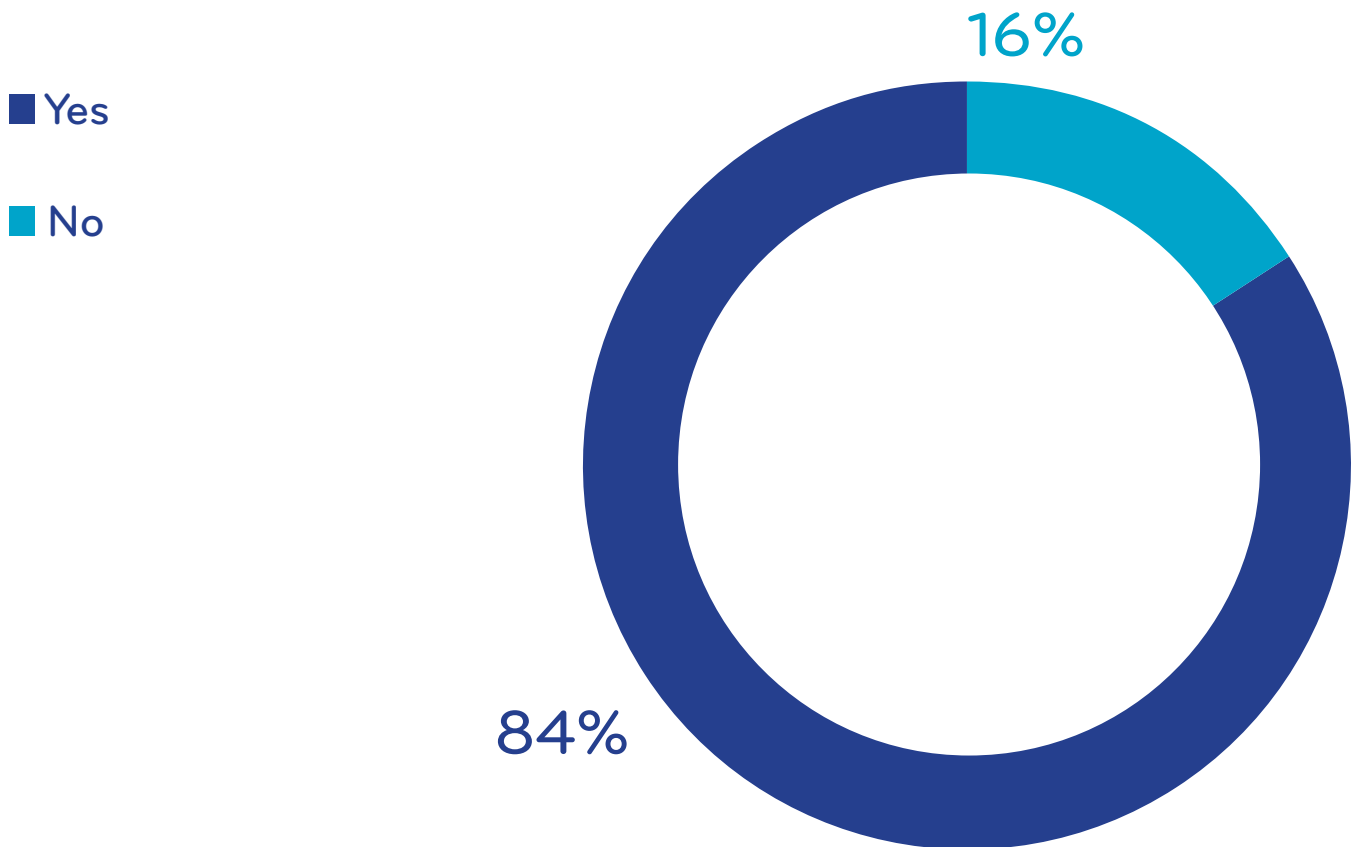
6.7 Support for older women is needed

“We need funding and opportunities especially for women OVER 35”

“Because without change in all these areas we will never have equality in the theatre, especially for us older women. I always imagined the theatre industry to be the trailblazers. How wrong I was. In fact they have a lot of catching up to do compared to other industries. I know this from experience.”

Evidence Seven

84% of respondents are still being impacted by the effects of the pandemic.



Evidence Eight

In terms of how respondents are being impacted by the pandemic, key themes are:

8.1 Financial problems caused by the pandemic are hard to recover from

“I am working to keep my head above water, not to develop new ideas and pieces of work. I’m so knackered, I do not even have the headspace to write a Creative Scotland application so that I might (might! after weeks of working on the application) have time out to write.”

“Financially still trying to recoup my losses”

“I couldn’t work on my creative projects as I had to work full time in my day job as I was the only earner in my house hold - this has had a knock on affect after the pandemic.”

“Huge financial hole. Caring. Lack of available support. Change of financial circumstances. Age/health recovery. Also a personal change in what I’m prepared to tolerate!”

“I graduated during the pandemic, the stress on the workforce post pandemic means that the industry I have walked into is chaotic and hard work and not paying enough to be sustainable, especially when women are paid less than men.”

8.2 Impact on theatres

“Work load has increased but salaries haven’t. Audiences have been slower to return and everything feels very precarious and a bit on a knife edge which is exhausting and stressful. It has been really hard and right now I can’t see when things will get better.”

“Staff shortages due to recruitment issues have led to long hours and burn out.”

“Less staff in the department/theatre that I work for due to redundancy’s in the pandemic”

“Lack of work and venues (capacity + focus) are in survival mode.”

“Less money available in theatre. Buildings/production houses prefer monologues/low budget plays. Focus on filling seats so more opportunities for existing big

names in writing/acting/directing. It’s a macro issue not a women issue. But women are more affected due to being paid less than men and taking on more domestic work.”

“The pandemic has decreased funding and I also think solidified a lot of elitist behaviour in the industry.”

8.3 Less opportunities

“Some freelance gigs I had before the pandemic have never picked up again. It feels like there are less opportunities in general.”

“Less commissions available in theatre.”

“Less writing commissions, less funding - NPO decisions.”

“As I’ve said, opportunities are dwindling and doors that were once ajar are now firmly shut. Jumping from small scale to mid scale (or from emerging to mid career) seems impossible now that so many of those mid-scale theatres are closed or closed to newcomers.”

8.4 Impact of postponed and cancelled projects

“A number of projects postponed in 2020/21 are still awaiting rollout.”

“Work that was cancelled means I am down on income. I am also finding that appetite for my work is lower unless the idea is commercial.”

“Everything has been delayed so I’ve had to seek alternative work.”

“It is difficult to get new work programmed, especially as an emerging artist, as many/most theatres are still focussing on commissions and commitments made pre-pandemic. It is hard to enter the industry right now, or to take a step up in your career when there is a backlog and when theatres are going for established names due to financial pressures.”

8.5 Mental health impact

“Mentally, physically drained. Lack of funding. Many rejections.”

“Mental health took a hammering. You can’t see a sector shut down overnight and soldier on.”

“Taking on too much work through fear of it disappearing again caused me to have a bipolar relapse. I don’t even have kids, so can only imagine that the stress of the pandemic, home schooling, money and career insecurity must have had a huge impact on many women, who disproportionately bore the brunt of pandemic measures.”

8.6 Childcare issues

“Capacity, pace, not being able to be back in town as much as people go back due to childcare needs.”

“Because of the fall out within families and the effect it has had on children - its harder for mums to go away to work”

8.7 Risk averse climate

“Theatre attendance is down, theatre companies are more cautious and need bankable projects. All this makes it harder to make a living as a playwright and also to develop and tell stories that aren’t necessarily mainstream.”

“Many venues closed. No one willing to take risks. Only highly commercial theatre gets support”

“As an AD of a touring new writing theatre company without regular public subsidy we are directly impacted by the risk averse and overly cautious attitude of larger, regularly subsidised organisations and venues.”

“Work that was cancelled means I am down on income. I am also finding that appetite for my work is lower unless the idea is commercial.”

Conclusion

This report makes the following recommendations based on the report's findings:

- **Policy changes**

For Arts Council England and the UK government to make policy changes to better support women in theatre and women generally post pandemic. This is based on this report's findings of a desire for policy change and also an urgent need in terms of 84% of women still being impacted by the effects of the pandemic.

- **Childcare support**

For Arts Council England and UK theatres to consider how better to support childcare responsibilities. This is based on the repeated finding in this survey that one of the key areas women require support on is in terms of this area.

- **Funding to support women in theatre**

84% of women in theatre would like to see funding to support women in theatre - this theme is also recurrent throughout the survey and, as such, we recommend Arts Council England and the DCMS take measures to provide specific funding to support women in theatre and address gender inequality in theatre.

- **Programmes to support women in theatre**

This survey has repeatedly found a desire for programmes specifically aimed at supporting women in theatre and a need for these programmes. As such, we recommend Arts Council England, the DCMS and UK theatres consider how best to implement this recommendation.

This survey is based on a 95% confidence level and 8% margin of error, meaning that findings are extremely likely to be similar were all women in theatre to be surveyed. The survey sample size is similar to studies such as those by Professor Dawn Bennett on women and arts careers in Australia and is 155, which is viewed as a strong sample size in research, building on the original Women in Theatre Survey, which had a sample size of 387. The survey was distributed via social media and via snowball sampling, as used by Professor Dawn Bennett in her work on women and arts careers in Australia, with the support of organisations including The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, the London Playwrights' Blog, Playwriting UK and Stella Quines amongst others.

This is the fourth research report I have written for Sphinx Theatre in 5 years - following the update to "What Share of the Cake", the Women in Theatre Forum Report, which brought together all of the most recent leading research on women in theatre from different organisations including The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, Stage Directors UK, ERA 50:50, Black Womxn in Theatre and PIPA for the first time, and the Women in Theatre Survey.

As such, we urge for action to be taken now - to return to Artistic Director of Sphinx Theatre Sue Parrish's quote, we raise the question: "how much more proof do you need?" And we hope the answer will be, at least for some readers, that it is time to take action now and to put in place the measures that we are able to in our different roles and which we hope this research over the last five years demonstrates is urgently needed.

JENNIFER TUCKETT

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