

MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT, AND ARTS ALLIANCE
**LIVE THEATRE AND EVENTS
INDUSTRY SURVEY**
2018



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LIVE THEATRE AND EVENTS INDUSTRY SURVEY 2018

INTRODUCTION

Late in 2017, elected MEAA entertainment, crew, and sport representatives from across the live theatre and events industry decided to join together to build an industry-wide campaign to improve members' working lives across the sector. The first step is this survey. The survey provides a snapshot of the wages, conditions, and health and safety standards that crew, technical, front-of-house, and events workers in live theatre and venues are faced with every day.

Some parts of the survey were developed in response to the 2017 Sexual Harassment in Live Theatre survey conducted by MEAA Equity, but prior to the release of the *Code of Practice: Preventing discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying* that Live Performance Australia has developed in partnership with MEAA.

Workers in the theatre, live events, and entertainment industries often work long, unsociable hours to provide the community with the creative outlets that enrich our lives. They are skilled and dedicated workers who, as we will see, do not consistently receive the payments or entitlements commensurate with the work they do, particularly when it comes to overtime and higher duties; and who often deal with inconsistent health and safety standards, bullying, harassment, or fatigue.

DATA

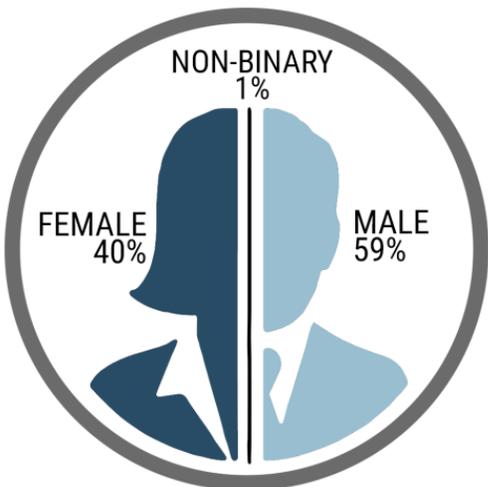
More than 300 workers in theatres and live venues from around the country responded to the survey. Of these, approximately two thirds worked in back-of-house production, with approximately one-quarter in front-of-house role and the remainder a mix of administration, creatives, and other roles. From this we can surmise that the results of the survey underrepresent front-of-house workers. These workers are more likely to be casual, are more likely to be women, and sometimes face different challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

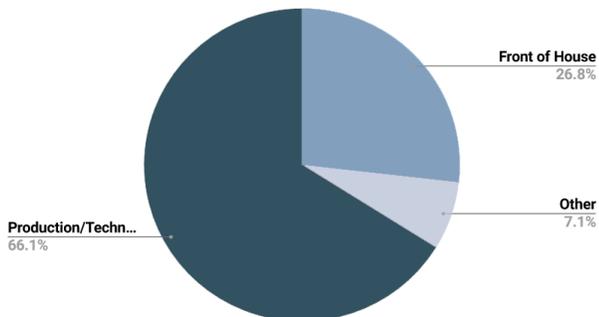
This work was undertaken primarily on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and that of the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation. We pay respects to the traditional custodians - past, present, and emerging - of these and all lands of this country.



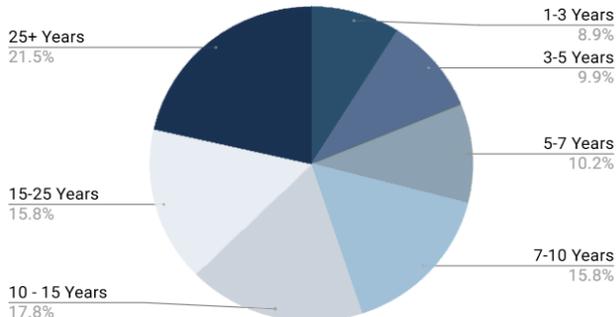
NATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS



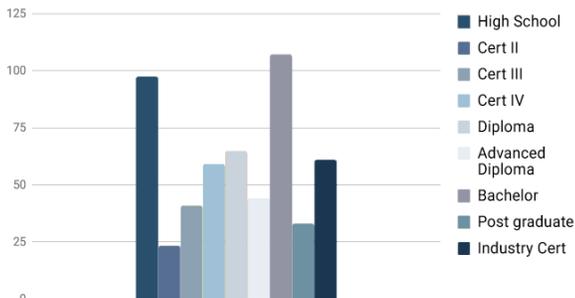
What is your primary role?



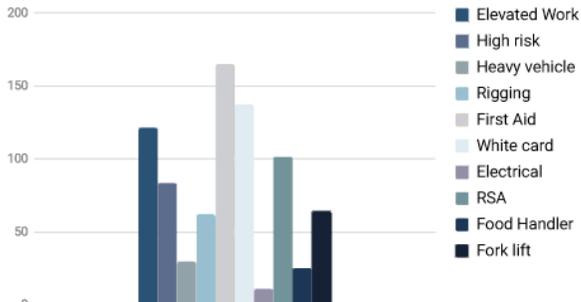
How long have you been working in the industry?



What qualifications do you hold?



What industry licenses do you hold?



TOP THREE ISSUES

**Q: IF YOU COULD
IMPROVE THREE
THINGS AT WORK
WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

1. BETTER PAY
2. ROSTERING
3. RESPECT

Better Pay

Responses to this question were free of any prompts or restrictions, and reveal what is top of mind for people working in the industry. Being paid fairly had twice as many responses as the second highest answer, with more than half of the respondents raising it as a key issue. Whether it is a higher base rate, a four-hour minimum call, a rate that is appropriate for the level of skill brought to the table, compensation for the intensification of work following staff cuts, super being paid on all hours worked, or simply being paid the same rate as workers in other venues who are doing the same job, it is clear that wages are seen as a signal of respect and justice as well as being the means to make ends meet.

- *"It is highly skilled work with incredibly demanding hours, but our pay rate does not really reflect that"* (theatre back-of-house, Vic);
- *"Pay what we are worth"* (theatre back-of-house, NSW);
- *"The responsibility of supervisors is inadequately compensated"* (racecourse front-of-house, Vic);
- *"Be on a pay level to match other theatres! (...)Heads of departments are earning less than standard crew at other theatres"* (theatre back-of-house, WA);
- *"To have a minimum 4 hour call. Often it feels like it's not really worth coming in for just three hours"* (front-of-house, Vic);
- *"not be expected to take less pay to help lower costs - or being guilted into it"* (freelance back-of-house, Vic).

Rostering

It is no surprise that rostering was prominent as an issue that workers would want to improve. Not only does it affect how much people can earn in order to make ends meet, it is an area in which employers have the most impact on their lives outside of the job. More notice of rosters was the biggest change respondents wanted to see, as well as the ability to swap shifts, and fairness in shift allocation. Further questions revealed that 40% of employees felt that rosters are not allocated a fair and equitable way – a response that was consistent across front- and back-of-house workers. Respondents cited perceptions of favouritism, bias, and at times discrimination in how they saw rosters being handled.

- *"I am rarely given an expected end time for shifts. We leave when the job is done, so I have to set aside the whole day for a show - even if I only end up working for 3 hours that morning"* (sporting venue back-of-house, NSW);
- *"A longer lead time on rosters (allows for making arrangements to get childcare or acquiring shifts at other employers)"* (venue back-of-house, Vic);
- *"The work to be rostered more equitably between workers who are available"* (theatre back-of-house, Vic);
- *"Shift swaps have become very difficult to organise and it means that staff like myself who work for several companies in the industry run into problems managing our jobs"* (front-of-house, NSW);
- *"More consideration for the lives of the crew as a result of how they are rostered"* (back-of-house, Vic).

Respect

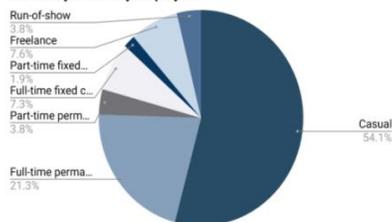
Better consultation, more understanding of the work people do, and greater respect from management was another standout issue. Many noted that they thought managers needed more training and professionalism, that decision makers needed to operate in a way that is more consultative and transparent, and that management either doesn't understand or takes for granted the skill and commitment that employees bring to their roles.

- *"Wish management would work in our shoes on difficult nights"* (front-of-house, NSW);
- *"More transparency, consultation and communication from upper/middle management on matters/decisions that will impact our working conditions and/or pay packet"* (live performance, front- and back-of-house, Vic);
- *"Training for managers - communication, leadership, professionalism"* (administration, Qld);
- *"Better communication about what will be required on the shift"* (freelance, NSW).

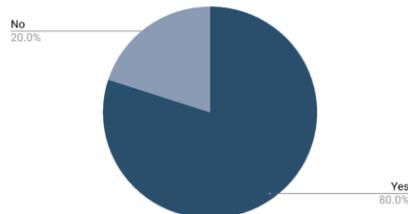


INDUSTRIAL ISSUES

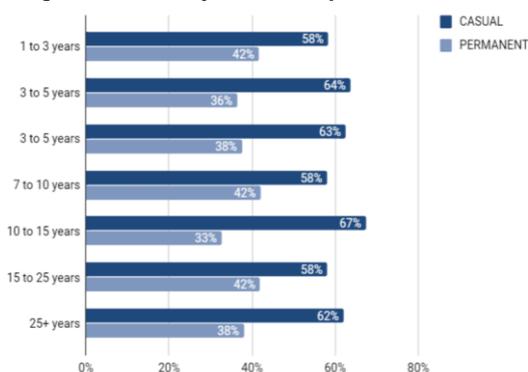
How are you usually employed?



I regard working in this industry as my career:



Length in the industry – casual vs permanent



Careers and Insecure Work

Insecure work dominates the industry. Only one in four respondents had ongoing employment with guaranteed hours, that is, permanent employment. Whether it is because of contract renewals, waiting for the next gig, or varying rosters, three in four workers cannot be certain what their income will be in the near future. Despite insecure employment, 80% of respondents regard their work in the industry as their career. This perspective was nearly universal (96%) for production and technical employees, 87% of whom hold an industry licence and/or an academic qualification in a field specific to their work.

Length of service does not correlate with a progression from casual to secure employment arrangements: almost half of casuals reported that they had worked in the industry for more than 10 years. Of this group, almost 40% have worked in the industry for 25 years or more. We have a workforce that is committed to the industry, but employment that is characterised by its lack of commitment to them.

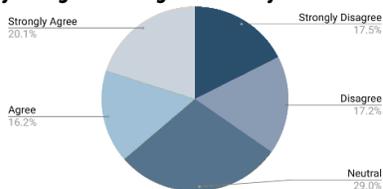
“Many casual venue employees work successive shows back to back with no down-time in between. This means they are effectively working full or part time already but without any job security or benefits. (...) the introduction of permanent venue positions would make this practice difficult to pursue. In addition, it recognises the dedication of certain employees to pursuing their careers in one particular venue with job security and access to paid leave” (theatre back-of-house, Vic).

Recognition of Working Higher Duties

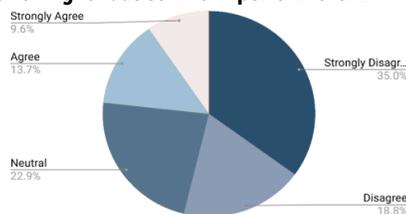
More than 36% of respondents said they frequently undertook duties higher than those they were employed to do. Of those, more than 50% said that they were not compensated for higher duties, and more than a quarter said they were expected to perform higher duties without adequate training or support.

Qualitative responses indicated that sometimes there is little notice of or planning for higher duties, and although workers may regularly be required to undertake duties above their pay grade, these opportunities may not lead to promotions and higher wages.

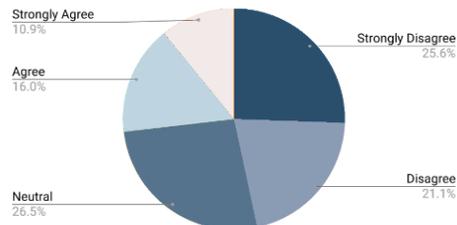
I am frequently doing duties higher than my classification.



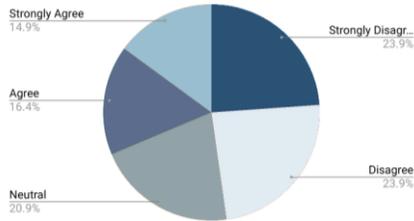
I am compensated for higher duties when I perform them.



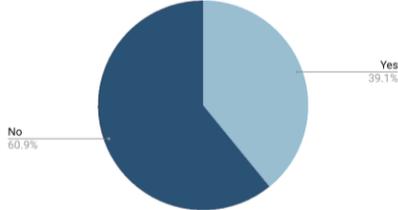
I am regularly asked to perform higher duties without adequate training or support.



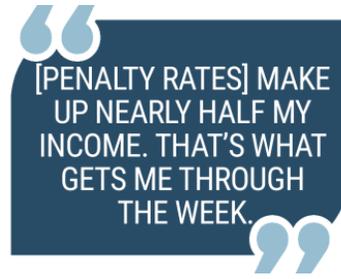
The penalty rates I receive for overtime are fair.



I rely on rostered overtime to meet my living costs.



Overtime Rates

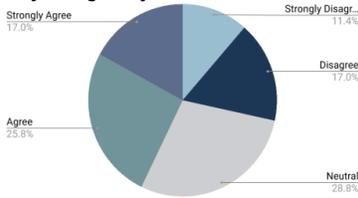


(theatre back-of-house, SA)

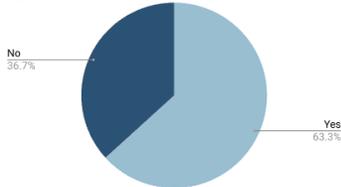
A significant number of respondents – nearly 40% – reported that they rely on overtime to meet their everyday living costs. Less than a third of respondents thought that they got paid fairly for overtime, with nearly half believing that their overtime pay is not fair. Those who said penalties were not fair were more likely to report relying on penalties to pay their everyday living costs.

SAFETY ISSUES

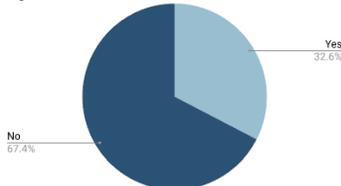
Health and safety is regularly discussed and monitored.



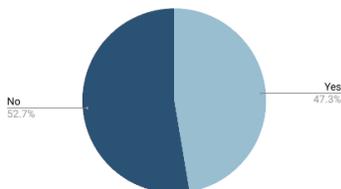
Have you been provided with internal health and safety training?



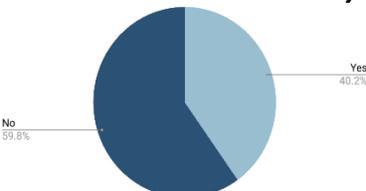
Have you been provided in external health and safety training?



Have you taken part in a safety or evacuation drill in the last 12 months?



Have you been consulted on what health and safety training you need?



Health and Safety Culture

Consistently, across different work areas and regardless of time in the industry, fewer than half of respondents (43%) reported that health and safety is regularly discussed or monitored in their workplace.

More than a third of respondents reported not having been provided with internal health and safety training in their current employment (37%), and this was consistent across both casual and permanent staff. Less than 50% of respondents reported having participated in a safety drill in the past 12 months.

Around 60% of participants had not been consulted on what health and safety training they need.

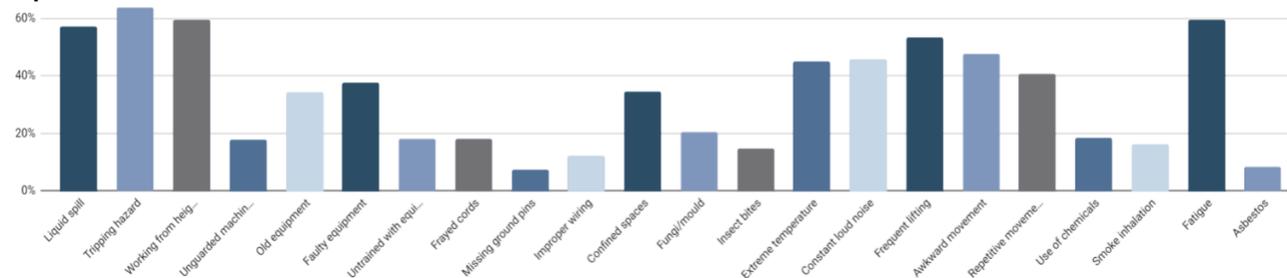
“There needs to be recognition and open discussion about work conditions and where they fall short - When working six days a week and averaging between 40 and 80 hours worked, it can have a disastrous effect on mental and physical health. Even having an open dialogue about it and finding ways to remedy it would be great” (theatre back-of-house, NSW).

Physical Hazards

Tripping hazards, fatigue, working at heights and liquid spills were reported as the most frequently encountered hazards in the last 12 months, with four out of five respondents reporting that they had experienced one or more of these.

"I have often been asked to climb truss at dangerous heights, operate EWP's and forklifts without the appropriate tickets, work incredibly long hours (up to 24 hours), work with employees who are under the influence of psychoactive substances or severely sleep-deprived, and perform unsafe heavy lifting alone onsite" (freelance back-of-house, NSW).

Reports of hazards – last 12 months



Back-of-house

Back-of-house crew reported exposure to a variety of physical hazards in the course of their work, including trip hazards (75%), awkward movement/lifting (67%), constant loud noise (51%), and extreme temperatures (45%).

While arguably some of these may be part and parcel of the work environment, and may consequently be mitigated through active management of safety, a relatively high number also reported exposure to faulty equipment (47%) and/or outdated machinery (44%).

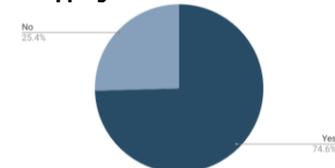
It is reasonable to assume that the presence of faulty and outdated equipment could indicate a lack of attention to safety management in some workplaces, and question whether other common safety hazards are being appropriately mitigated. 72% had encountered fatigue, with 57% saying that it is a serious problem in their workplace. Fatigue acts as a multiplier for other hazards (*Fatigue Prevention in the Workplace, Worksafe Victoria June 2017*). Given the potential for serious injury in the back of house environment, these results should sound an alarm for employers.

"There is very much an atmosphere of "do whatever it takes" in the production department - Often if an actor is quite unwell they are encouraged to take time off, even if it means cancelling a show (which is what should happen) however if you are in the technical department it is the opposite. I've seen stage managers vomiting into buckets while calling shows, ASMs working with broken feet, and I was personally encouraged to continue working after a serious injury that took place backstage" (freelance, back-of-house, NSW).

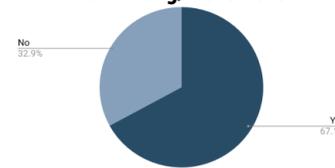
Top 6 issues for back-of-house

In the past 12 months I have encountered—

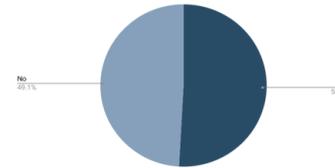
1. tripping hazards



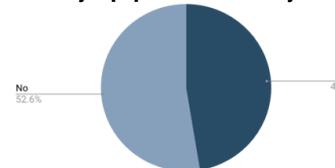
2. awkward lifting/movement



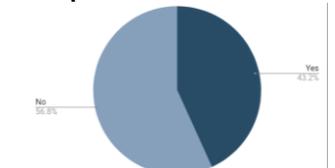
3. constant loud noise



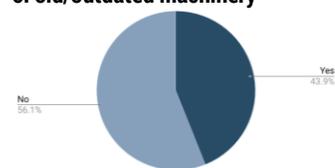
4. faulty equipment/machinery



5. temperature extremes



6. old/outdated machinery

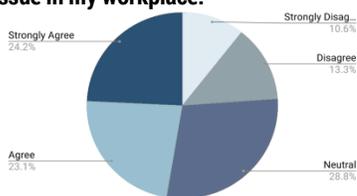


Front-of-house

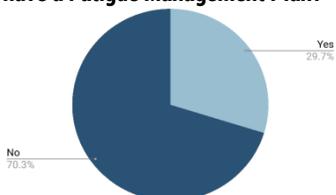
Although front-of-house workers are encountering physical hazards at lower rates than the most serious back-of-house issues, it is still often physically demanding work that can be performed in difficult environments.

The hazards encountered in the last 12 months were different, with liquid spills (56%) the most prevalent, followed by temperature extremes (47%), tripping hazards (44%), constant loud noise (35%), and fatigue (31%).

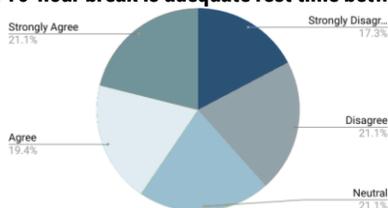
Fatigue is a major issue in my workplace.



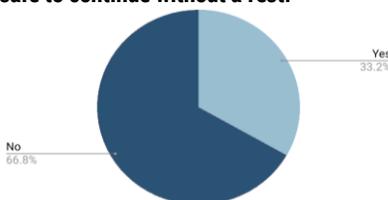
Does your work area have a Fatigue Management Plan?



Back-of-house: A 10-hour break is adequate rest time between shifts.



Back-of-house: I am regularly expected to work through a meal break, even though it feels unsafe to continue without a rest.



Fatigue

Overall, approximately 60% of participants had encountered fatigue in the last 12 months, and nearly 50% identified fatigue as a major issue in their workplace.

Among back-of-house employees, those numbers rose to 71% and 57% respectively. However, just 30% of respondents reported the existence of Fatigue Management Plans in their area. Almost 40% of respondents in back-of-house felt that the industry standard 10-hour turnaround between shifts was not an adequate rest break. A majority (58%) of reported that this turnaround break is regularly shortened at the request of management.

One in three back-of-house respondents reported that they regularly work through meal breaks even though it feels unsafe to continue without a rest. Only a handful of qualitative responses reported that they received adequate payment when a meal was missed.

These results are concerning. The reported prevalence of fatigue and its exacerbation through broken turnarounds and missed meal breaks creates a potential for serious injuries to back-of-house staff and others working in the same environments, particularly when coupled with the relatively high presence of physical hazards in production areas (see above).

"Burnout is a serious problem and often people don't recognise it and feel they are letting down the show if they need to take time off." (theatre back-of-house, Vic)

Bullying and Harassment

From our results, it appears that bullying is prevalent, and is more common than employers may be aware. 55% of respondents experienced or witnessed bullying in the workplace in the past 12 months. However, only 57% of these incidents were reported, and there was low satisfaction with outcomes once reported (36%). In front-of-house, satisfaction with outcomes dropped to 23%.

Nearly a third of all workers reported that they had been a victim of intimidation, shouting, and excessive criticism (in back-of-house, 42%), while one in six responded that they faced discrimination, gossip, or unwarranted threats of dismissal or disciplinary action on a regular basis.

A third of respondents did not feel comfortable reporting bullying and intimidating behaviours to their superior (in front-of-house, 40%). A third of respondents did not feel that management deals with these issues appropriately or takes them seriously.

“While the managers are very good at helping facilitate a production, they struggle with issues of harassment or disruptive employees. It is also difficult to bring up issues with the managers since they are often the ones allocating shifts so people don't want to be seen to be rocking the boat” (back-of-house, Vic).

Q: WHY DID YOU NOT REPORT THE HARASSMENT INCIDENT?

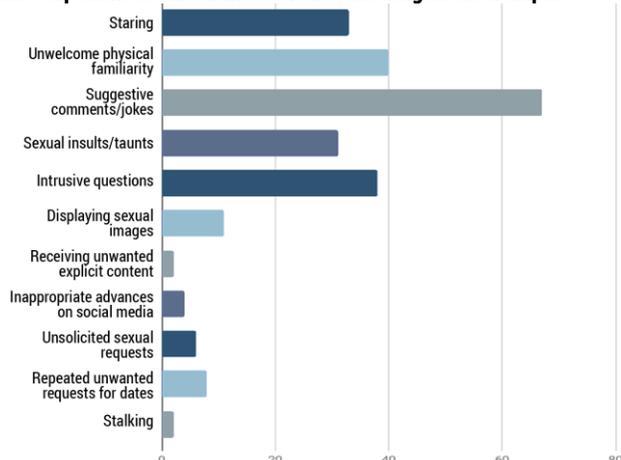
I'D LOSE MY JOB.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OUTWEIGH ANY REWARD.

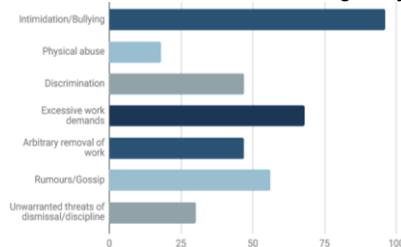
IT'S A BOYS CLUB AND ANYONE SEEN AS 'FRAGILE' OR 'WEAK' GETS THRASHED.

(theatre back-of-house, Vic; back-of-house, SA; back-of-house, NSW)

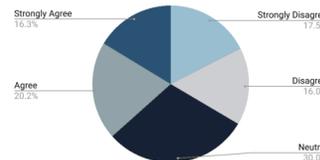
I have experienced one or more of the following in the workplace



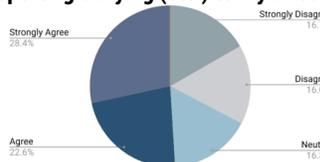
I have been the victim of one or more of the following in my workplace.



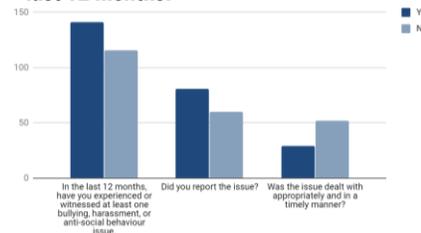
I feel that management deals with bullying (etc.) seriously and responds appropriately.



I feel comfortable reporting bullying (etc.) to my direct superior.



Bullying (etc.) – last 12 months.



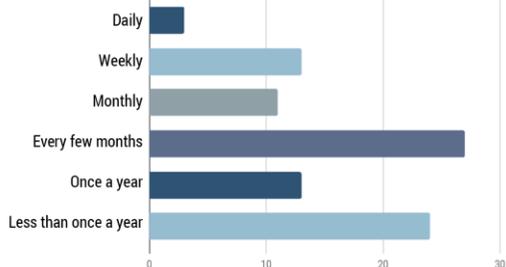
Sexual Harassment

36% of all respondents had been the victim of sexual harassment in the workplace. 33% reported that they had personally witnessed this behaviour in the last 12 months. Accounts of sexual and suggestive jokes, insults and taunts, staring/leering, intrusive questioning, and unwelcome physical familiarity show up in the results from all states and across a majority of venues.

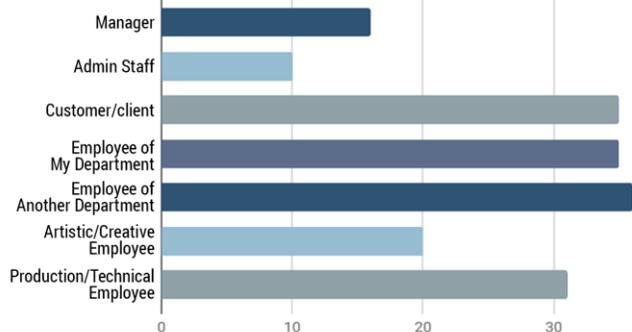
Women were twice as likely as men to have experienced sexual harassment (47% and 22% respectively), while back-of-house workers were much more likely to report having witnessed it than those in front-of-house (40% and 19%).

Front-of-house workers experienced harassment most frequently from customers and patrons (32%) and other employees within their department (26%). Back-of-house staff more frequently identified employees within their own department (32%) and other technical staff (39%) as perpetrators. This may indicate that front-of-house workers,

How often have you experienced this action or behaviour?



Who perpetrated this behaviour?



Sexual harassment: front-of-house



One in three: sexualised jokes or comments within the course of their work.



One in five: intrusive questions or statements about their private life.



One in ten: unwelcome or unnecessary physical familiarity; prolonged staring/leering.



One in twenty: repeated unwanted requests to go on dates; sexual insults and taunts.

who are more likely to be women, are more isolated from other workers when they encounter these behaviours.

The most common reason given for not reporting sexual harassment and abuse was the belief that nothing could be done about it, followed by fears of reprisal, such as having their hours cut, losing their job entirely, or damage to their reputation. Of those who witnessed the behaviour, the most common reasons for not reporting were a fear of repercussions toward the victim, and hoping that the issue would be resolved otherwise.

More than 40% of respondents reported that their employer did not have a sexual harassment policy. More than 85% of respondents said that their employer did not have a dedicated contact person to go to if they had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment. Fewer than 20% of respondents said that their employer provided training on sexual harassment, in contrast to the nearly two-thirds who had received some form of health and safety training. Similarly, more than 90% of respondents reported that their employer did not have a 'no-retaliation' policy in place. 88% said that there was no clear process to report incidents of sexual harassment or assault to their employer.

The responses paint a picture of an environment recognisable from *MEAA 2017 Sexual Harassment in Live Theatre* survey, which focussed mainly on performers but also included responses from other workers. It found a similar rate of people who had suffered sexual harassment (40%), and a fear of reprisals as a major reason for not reporting, along with a belief that nothing could be done.

However, our data shows that in venues where training is provided and there are clear reporting mechanisms for victims and witnesses, the rate of incidents decreases and the overall satisfaction with how management deals with these issues increases. This is a hopeful sign.

The new Code of Practice on bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual harassment provides clear policies and processes for dealing with sexual harassment, including the appointment of a contact person, and a process to investigate and deal with complaints. However, our numbers show that policies must be proactively implemented and followed to make a difference to workers.

CONCLUSION

There is a proud union history in theatres and live venues across Australia. Delegates and members are part of a tradition that stretches back more than a hundred years. The work they have done to build safe, professional workplaces with good paying jobs is seen and felt in some of this country's most iconic venues.

But it is work that is never complete. Changes to our cultural and industrial landscape affect our workplaces and our members. The survey has identified the biggest issues affecting workers in theatres and live venues today.

Inadequate payment, uncertain rosters, and lack of understanding and respect from management make life more difficult for our members. But more than that, the survey paints an overall picture of how these issues intersect to leave workers vulnerable.

An individual worker who relies financially on uncertain overtime shifts and who fears retaliation may find it difficult to report harassment. A corporation with a highly casualised workforce may be able to rely on highly skilled workers to solve production problems without acknowledging or paying for those skills. Someone contending with fatigue, bullying or harassment will be more likely to have an accident in a poorly maintained venue.

Yet our industry relies on these workers to produce shows night after night, to make sure patrons are happy and safe, and to manage the steady stream of ticket sales, subscriptions and food and beverage service that keeps it all going.

Workers can see the problems but are not in a position to fix them alone. It is time for workers to come together to demand better from the industry that relies on their commitment, skill, and availability. As a union, it is time that we unite across venues and theatres to make those demands heard, and to change our industry together.

