WOMEN IN THEATRE SURVEY

WOMEN IN THEATRE SURVEY 2021

In partnership with
Sphinx Theatre | University Women in the Arts
The Writers' Guild of Great Britain | the December Group
Equity | ERA 50:50 | Stage Directors UK

Funded by
Arts Council England

Introduction

The Women in Theatre Survey was conducted in 2021 to investigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women in theatre. This is the first survey specifically gathering information on women in theatre in the UK in terms of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This is also one of the largest recent surveys specifically focused on women in theatre in the UK. It is a follow up survey to the more general Women in Theatre Forum Report in 2021, which was supported by the same partners. Both parts of the project have been funded by Arts Council England. Key recommendations from the survey are:

- For the focus the pandemic has thrown on women taking on the majority of caring and domestic tasks responsibilities to be taken as an opportunity to address the issue of much of childcare and domestic tasks still falling on women via the setting up of a childcare and caring responsibilities support fund by Arts Council England, which would enable those with caring responsibilities to apply for support to facilitate work in the arts, and via specific action by the UK government more generally to provide support for women on this issue.

"This is the first survey specifically gathering information on women in theatre in the UK in terms of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic."

- For specific support to be provided to support older women in theatre (40+) by Arts Council England, which has been highlighted as an area urgently in need of redress. For specific support to be provided by the UK government on this issue more generally as well, for example in Australia the state of Victoria has provided $50 million support for women over the age of 45 in securing jobs post-pandemic in recognition of this group's increased challenges. For theatre organisations to consider what support they can provide in terms of this area as well.
- For the UK government and Arts Council England to take action to urgently increase awareness of gender bias and provide guidance on this issue to prevent an increase in gender inequality post pandemic.
- For specific support to help women recover from the pandemic to be provided by the government, Arts Council England and theatre organisations, for example in the form of quotas to bring about long-term change and prevent increased gender

inequality and/or in the form of specific schemes, funding, training and job opportunities. This has been provided by other countries including Australia who have set aside in the state of Victoria alone $150 million to support women in coming back from the pandemic which includes funds for schemes, training, childcare support and new job opportunities.

- For staff working in theatre organisations and policymakers to urgently be trained on unconscious bias and using a gender lens and ensuring gender-balanced teams. For theatre organisations to provide guidance and training for staff on this issue.
- For mentoring and training to be provided to help women in theatre recover post-pandemic, for example respondents repeatedly highlighted issues of loss of confidence via being out of the industry during the pandemic due to caring responsibilities or loss of jobs.

Australia's Victorian Minister for Women Gabrielle Williams, whose state has provided $150 million to support women recover from the pandemic, has stated "The pandemic has confirmed what we knew all along – women face an uphill battle every day in the workforce. It's time it changed."

We hope theatre organisations, Arts Council England and the UK government will use the findings from this survey to urgently take action in the UK.

Jennifer Tuckett

Author of this report, Research and Literary Director at Sphinx Theatre, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer for over 10 years at universities around the world, as well as completing the world first major mixed methods research project into how to improve the transition for women from studying the arts to working in the arts at the University of Cambridge and the What Share of the Cake and Women in Theatre Forum Reports for Sphinx Theatre, the UK's longest established women's theatre company, amongst other partners.

"The pandemic has confirmed what we knew all along – women face an uphill battle every day in the workforce. It's time it changed."

WOMEN IN THEATRE SURVEY

Background

The Women in Theatre Survey was conducted in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

Previous general studies of the pandemic, including studies by the University of Cambridge and UN Women, have highlighted that women have been one of the hardest hit groups by the pandemic. For example the University of Cambridge's study "Inequality In The Impact Of The Coronavirus Shock: Evidence From Real Time Surveys" (Adams-Prassl et al, 2020), finds that women are one of the two hardest hit groups by the pandemic and states "overall, the results suggest that immediate action is required and that policies that aim to mitigate the shocks of the crisis should take into account the inequality in labor market impacts" and that "the results highlight the need for immediate policy responses that target those groups in the population that are most affected by the crisis."

This study seeks to provide urgently needed data, as indicated by Adams-Prassl et al's findings, specifically on how women in theatre have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic for the first time.

The survey builds on What Share of the Cake, a mixed methods research project commissioned by Sphinx Theatre in 2020, and the Women in Theatre Forum Report, published in 2021, both of which were conducted by academic Jennifer Tuckett.

The Women in Theatre Forum Report was supported by the same group of partners as this survey, bringing together many of the UK's leading unions and women's theatre groups for the first time: The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Sphinx, Equity, the December Group, ERA 50: 50, University Women in the Arts and Stage Directors UK.

This is the first and largest survey specifically looking at how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted women in theatre in the UK.

The results indicate urgent action is needed to support women in UK theatre.

Methodology

This survey used closed and open questions inspired by Australian academic Professor Dawn Bennett's work on women and creative careers.

The survey is one of the largest surveys of women in UK theatre to take place in recent years, for example In Bloom's 2017 survey of women in theatre surveyed around 200 women.

The survey sample size for this survey is also comparable to other pandemic studies such as Deloitte Global's general survey on understanding the pandemic's impact on working women which surveyed 385 women, conducted by Forbes Insights. Similarly, the FT's global survey on the impact on parents of the pandemic surveyed 368 respondents.

As such, 387 women working professionally in UK theatre across the UK completed this Women in Theatre survey, also based on an ideal response rate to surveys often being thought of as around 400 respondents (after which results become no more likely to be representative of the entire population), with a confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%.

With a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, this means these findings would be approximately the same were all women in theatre in the UK to be surveyed.

The survey used snowball sampling, as well as ensuring a wide distribution via social media, events and mailing lists amongst other methods, to ensure a wide spread of responses, inspired by Professor Dawn Bennett's previous work and as used in other surveys such as the Arts Council's "Character Matters: Attitudes, behaviors and skills in the UK Museum Workforce", "Time for Change: black and minority ethnic representation in the children's literature sector" and "What is Resilience Anyway" surveys.

The partnership with The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Sphinx, Equity, University Women in the Arts, ERA 50:50 and Stage Directors UK has ensured one of the largest surveys on women working in theatre in UK theatre in recent years as well as being the first survey to specifically investigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women in theatre in the UK.

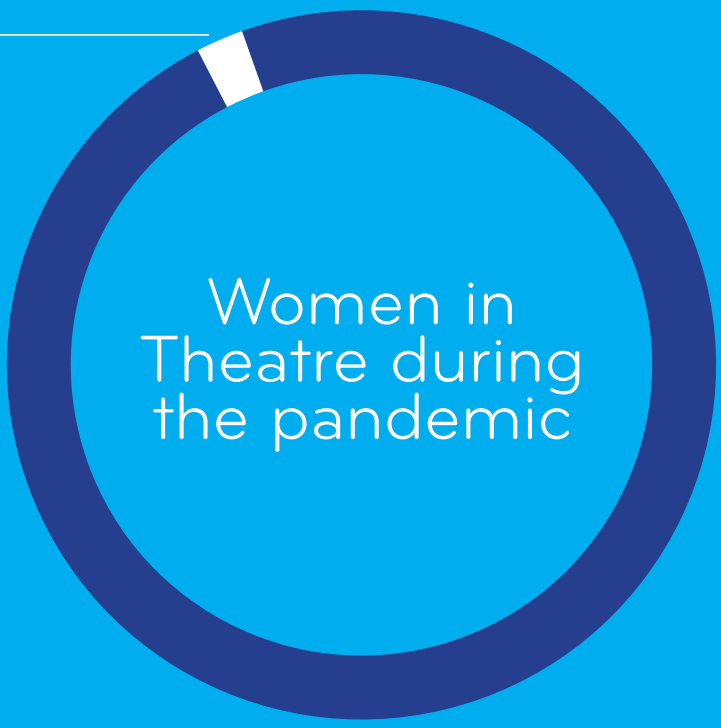
Key Findings 01

98% of women working in theatre who completed the survey have experienced challenges during the pandemic.

This extremely high percentage suggests that action should be taken to help women in theatre recover from the pandemic, further supported by findings from studies such as from the University of Cambridge (Adams-Prassl et al, 2020).

2%
Didn't experience challenges

98%
Experienced challenges



Key Findings 02

Women working professionally in UK theatre surveyed most often experienced decrease in freelance work followed by domestic task challenges and relationship challenges in terms of challenges experienced during the coronavirus pandemic.

Decrease in freelance work was experienced by nearly three quarters of respondents (74.41%), domestic task challenges by over a third of respondents (37.73%) and relationship challenges by over a third of respondents (36.41%).

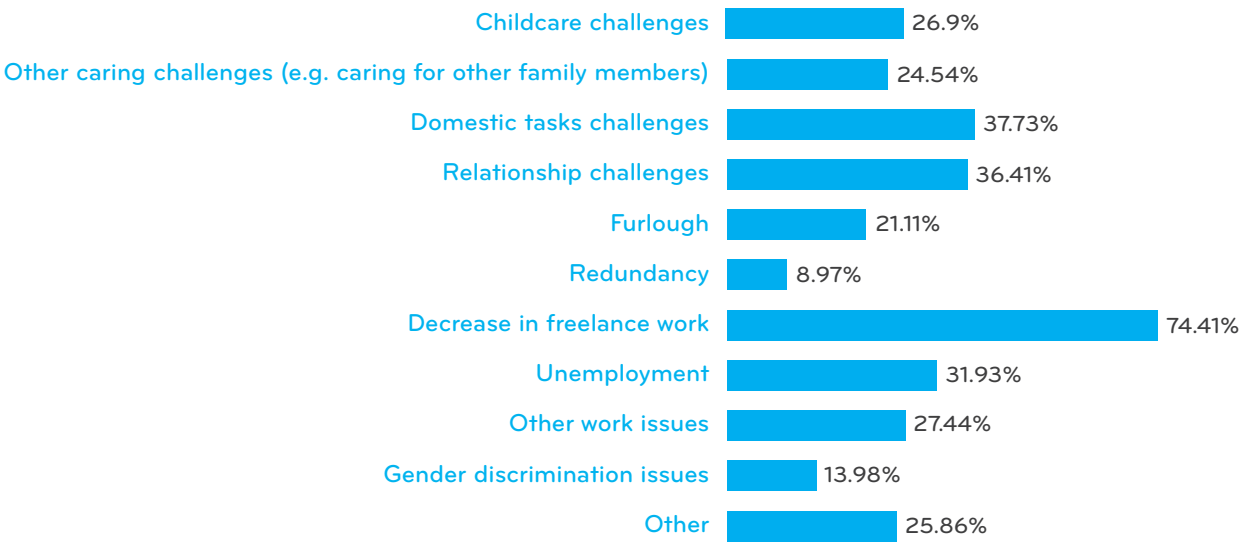
This suggests urgent action to support freelancers as well as action to support women with home-life responsibilities, which more general research has revealed often falls to women, would help women in theatre recover from the coronavirus pandemic, for example via specific funds via Arts Council England.

This is supported by the example of countries such as Australia who have provided specific funding to help women recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

Other significant challenges experienced by respondents during the pandemic include unemployment (experienced by nearly a third of respondents), childcare challenges (experienced by over a quarter of respondents) and other caring challenges (experienced by nearly a quarter of respondents).

Of "other" responses (experienced by a quarter of respondents) mental health was most often cited as a challenge.

Challenges experienced during the pandemic



Key Findings 03

In response to the open question "why do you think these challenges have occurred", issues linked to gender were the most commonly reported responses.

It is worth noting that the question "why do you think these challenges have occurred" was an entirely open question where any response could be made and so references to gender by respondents were unprompted, suggesting the need to urgently address gender equality in UK theatre.

The most commonly cited reasons why challenges have occurred during the coronavirus pandemic were:

1. Caring responsibilities falling primarily to women and society still assuming this is a woman's responsibility
2. Discrimination against older women over the age of 40
3. Women occupying more emerging and mid-stage jobs and likely to be seen as more of a risk in terms of careers.
4. Worsening of existing gender inequality during the pandemic

This suggests measures in the workplace and from the Arts Council and UK government to support women better in terms of caring responsibilities and also training and guidance to prevent gender bias and discrimination would be useful.

Comments included:

"Because people do not like to hire middle-aged/older women. Our expertise and salary demands are inconvenient."

"A lack of understanding or appreciation or support in the workplace for family responsibilities."

"Because women are generally the ones to pick up caring duties, and there is sometimes little understanding of this in the industry - especially when a male is in charge."

"Well, childcare closed, and I'm freelance, so I had to take that on."

"I have a 5 and 6 year old so obviously had to home school them and be their safe haven over this time period. Whilst I was of course happy to be there for them, the toll on my work was devastating and all work had to be put on hold as homeschooling was a full time job. When I did juggle Work and Homeschool it was incredibly stressful and was impossible to do both successfully. A really difficult time."

"Childcare fell on most women and women on lower income than men resulting in either loss of employment or not taking on any work."

"Lack of support and understanding/ realisation in the industry and at home. Earning lesser wage so needing to be the one who stopped work to care for children when schools closed."

"Because older women in particular are 'disappeared' from theatre work and have been for years."

"Within Britain, we're still very much working on a patriarchal system, making it more difficult for women to either return from looking after children, or be able to afford the balance of childcare with work."

"As I do most of the domestic work."

"We are still in a society that assumes women are the main care givers, domestic duties and careers secondary to men's."

"Women being expected to carry the caring load."

"Women, especially those of us who are mothers, are expected to juggle childcare, work/finding work, homeschooling, creative output, domestic chores (to name a few) and yet are not given any different aid or support to help us. Society expects us to do it all with a smile on our face and not show any signs of struggle, and if you do struggle you are just not working hard enough."

"As a working mother you are expected to do the bulk of the childcare and the idea that women give up their work, even if their pay is higher than their male partners, still exists once a baby arrives."

"There is not enough support for women in theatre, so they fell through the cracks very when the pandemic struck."

"There are far more women in the 'mid-scale' section of the arts - and it has definitely been the emerging and mid-scale that have been drastically affected."

"Covid!!!!! Women are invisible after 40!!!! Still. Child care, gig culture, no work, top heavy industry, no flexibility."

"As a female, early career artist, I think at a risky time for theatres I'm considered even more risky than before. It feels like a tough time to be anything in theatre let alone a writer, let alone a female writer who is not established."

"Historically there are less opportunities for women in theatre particularly older women and the pandemic has meant that any shows that have run have smaller casts making it even more difficult for women. Also women generally do more domestic work and take on majority of child care responsibilities impairing ability to focus fully on their careers."

"Work for women (as actors, writers, technical) is hard to find anyway, fewer roles are open to us, and the pandemic obviously meant lots of things closed, but with reopening, not exactly seeing a lot of support for women, especially working class women."

"There was no reinvention during COVID, just a doubling down on bad practice which was rampant pre-pandemic. When women assert themselves they're deemed difficult, which is frustrating when - if a male colleague said the same - they'd be lauded."

"Like so many women: work part time due to having small children and earn less than my partner, therefore his work has taken priority and I've had to keep up with all my freelance work while also juggling nearly full time childcare and the vast majority of the domestic workload."

"Women are expected to carry emotional burdens."

"Lack of work means women get even less work."

"Women are often the default carers, parents and house keepers."

"Because women take more onboard in terms of childcare and caring responsibilities in the home and the pandemic magnified these."

Key Findings
04

Women working in UK theatre surveyed would find improved freelancer support and specific action to support women from Arts Council England and the UK government most useful to address challenges experienced during the pandemic.

Over three quarters of respondents (76%) selected improved freelancer support as desired support to address challenges experienced during the pandemic.

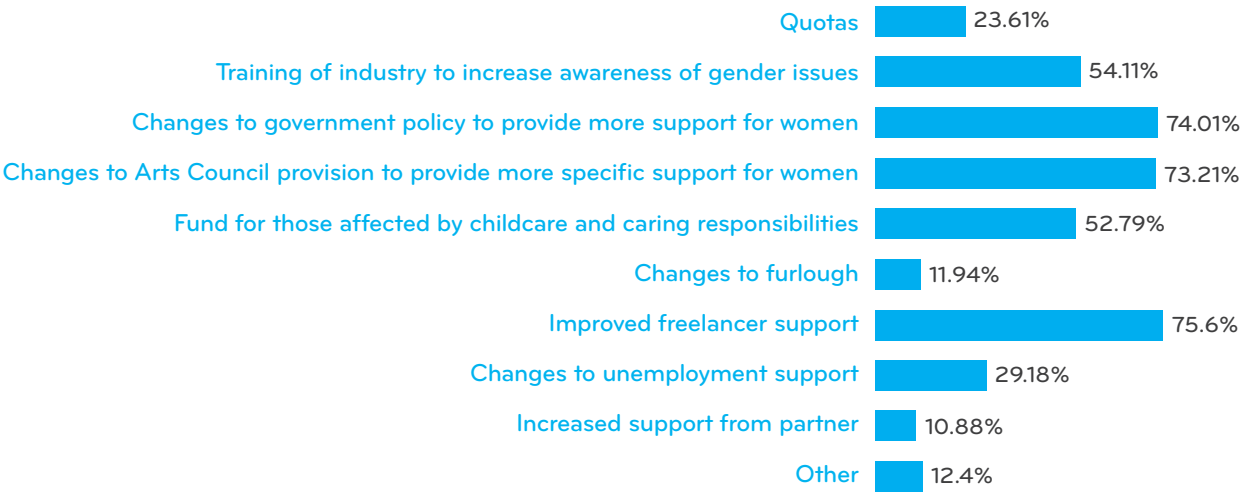
Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) selected changes to government policy to provide more support for women.

Nearly three quarters of respondents (73%) selected changes to Arts Council England provision to provide more specific support for women.

These extremely high figures (all at nearly three quarters of respondents) suggest specific actions from the Arts Council and UK government to support women as well as specific action to support all freelancers is urgently needed and would be useful and desired by women in theatre in the UK.

It is worth noting that training of industry to increase awareness of gender issues and fund for those affected by childcare and caring responsibilities were also both selected by over half of respondents, suggesting that these would be useful and desired measures to put in place as well.

Which of the following potential forms of support would you find useful (please select all that apply)



Key Findings 05

In response to the open question on why the selected forms of support would be useful, the most often cited reasons why this support would be useful included:

1. Creating greater gender parity and a level playing field
2. Providing support for childcare/caring responsibilities for women to be better able to continue work, an issue which the pandemic has shone a light on and exacerbated
3. Addressing ageism and the loss of opportunity for women over the age of 40

It is worth noting that the most cited reasons to the open question of why do you think your selected forms of support would be useful were again related unprompted to gender, suggesting the need for urgent action to address gender equality in the UK.

Comments included:

"More systemic change will make the gender inequality less difficult to navigate and will raise awareness with more funding bodies/clients/companies."

"To encourage more women and mothers to stay in the creative industries. The more there are, the more 'normal' their challenges will become."

"I think the pandemic has shone a light on gender inequalities that we perhaps thought had gone away. We all need to re-think some things."

"Because the changes can take place across the board not on a case by base basis."

"Until those who produce the work acknowledge the under representation of women in the theatre industry then nothing will change. If they won't do it willingly then they need to have pressure applied. The funders need to make more demands on those in receipt of funding investment."

"Because training and education could alert people to the additional challenges women face. Because caring for children or relatives is a tough and usually unpaid job, and although we do it with all our hearts, some acknowledgement of this would hugely benefit our mental health and careers."

"It's proven time and time again that women generally take on more care and domestic responsibilities, and this needs to be understood by the workplace and provision made for women to work flexibly where necessary."

"I do think that the industry underestimates the disparity of gender in our society. It's easily done, but a man's experience in the arts is far from a woman's, both from a performance perspective and a societal one. Women are not living in parity and the arts are not gender neutral either. This leads to men being employed more...they are literally more available for more roles for more money."

"I mostly think that having government help as a freelancer would be great as so many of us are excluded, with 1 in 4 of us now leaving the industry as we don't have the support to continue and with the fact that there is a gender imbalance in the industry and many female identifying creatives also taking on the brunt of childcare and caring responsibilities it seems that without this support that they are the one that are going to end up leaving the industry."

"I think childcare and carers funds should be made available, the lack of childcare needs to be addressed at gov level, seen in the media as a problem many women faced and are at a detriment due to the pandemic."

"I feel like this would something new and refreshing, to really take care of the freelance workforce - financially and in terms of mental health. I don't know how single parents have managed if they have 'fallen through the cracks' of financial aid. Some more training and support would give me (a woman) information and the tools to move forward with leadership skills which I feel has not been an option before (without "just going for it")."

"I would like more understanding and support from employers, arts council, government to acknowledge the two jobs I have, one as a mother and one as a worker. I think women generally (not always of course) become the main childcare provider whilst also maintaining a career in the arts, which is a really difficult thing to do. As a mother I want to be there for my kids and to be able to do the school run, be present as a mum, support them and nurture them. However as an artist and maker, my work is my passion and it is incredibly difficult to fit my work in to such a short day (9am-3pm). I therefore end up working all my evenings too once the kids have gone to bed. It is utterly exhausting but is the only way for me to keep my practice and company going. I have missed out on many opportunities due to being a mum and being unable to slot into the usual 8 hour day routine of many companies/employers/ projects and do feel I have faced occasional discrimination due to being a mum eg a job has gone to someone else without children because they can commit more time and are less 'complicated'. Discussion, policy and action would be helpful."

"They key factor to inequality is unconscious bias towards women playwrights and their stories. There needs to be much more awareness of bias amongst those with the power to commission women playwrights an those who critique the work. Quotas would ensure work written by women had to be developed and training would ensure both male and female theatre staff questioned their own prejudice and barriers."

"It has a lot to do with education and putting gender equality at the heart of everything - everything. We are all so tired of asking for this very simple, basic right - give us a level playing field!"

"Need a multiple approach to tackling the inequalities. Yes to quotes and training, but there also needs to financial support and initiatives that are both crisis in emergency and longer term."

"Because the unseen work tripled during the pandemic for women in particular and having this issue recognised, acknowledged and better challenged would go a long way towards better parity."

"We must change the way we think about women in theatre and mothers in theatre. We are functioning in a system that is not built for us and this has to change."

"Help with childcare would allow me to train and work."

"As an older women there are hardly any opportunities, most of my regular theatre work was done under the age of 45 because I looked under 40."

"At the moment, there is a frustrating dichotomy between an active consumption of the arts and a complete disregard for working in the arts as a viable career option, particularly for women, which is partly behind the current crisis."

"Women always bear the brunt of child care and 'domestic' responsibilities, and even more so during this Pandemic (as all the evidence has shown). It vastly reduces the amount of time we are able to work and this impacts access to opportunities and career trajectory in the long term."

"Either we want a culture that returns to an unapologetically paternalistic model or we move forward."

"The industry and ACE needs to take on responsibility for freelancers in general - so there needs to be more protection and support in future. People need to be trained around every day sexism as it is so ingrained in us it is otherwise impossible to unpick. Not much has changed in the past 30 yeas so it will not change in the future unless we actively combat it. We not only need to value women more but stop over valuing men. Having children is a HUMAN issue not a women's issue and should be treated as such. In order to achieve equality and support talent the industry needs to start looking after its most valuable asset - which is the freelance workforce."

"Enabling women to be able to access care support would mean they would be able to work more. Making film and television more representative of older women in relation to men would mean equality of roles available."

"Women are currently being completely forgotten by Arts Council."

"Women are still disproportionately affected by caring responsibilities. This should be recognised and structural change / funding support provided to enable an equitable and sustainable path to employment for women in the industry."

"Because women's challenges tend to be more invisible or just taken for granted so raised profile and practical support/funding would help to make them part of the infrastructure and less hidden."

"I've been exploring ageism in theatre for a few years and it specifically affects women. Acknowledging that our journeys into the arts have been more complex and that we still have something of interest to say, but need development support is crucial."

"Just one of the above would assist women in not having to choose between a personal and working life."

Key Findings
06

86% of women working in UK theatre surveyed are worried gender inequality will increase post-pandemic.

This extremely high figure, combined with responses from other questions and from other studies such as the University of Cambridge's, suggests urgent action needs to be taken to prevent both increased gender inequality post-pandemic but also to prevent women leaving the workforce due to this perception to address gender equality in the UK.

14%
NO

86%
YES



Key Findings 07

In response to the open question of why are respondents worried (or not worried) gender inequality will increase post-pandemic, responses particularly highlighted concerns around:

1. Women who have had to give up work due to caring responsibilities during the pandemic and whether their careers will be able to recover from this
2. A loss of confidence due to being out of the industry/losing work
3. That theatres will look for box office success and less risk post-pandemic which often means male written.

This suggests mentoring or training support for women, as provided by countries like Australia, to help women recover from the pandemic and to address issues such as loss of confidence would be useful, as well as support for new job creation in the arts, which other countries have also undertaken to support women post-pandemic, and guidance from Arts Council England to theatres on ensuring gender equality post-pandemic and/or quotas would be useful.

Comments included:

"Because economic insecurity and structural prejudice are often bedfellows. Structural prejudice feasts off of economic instability meaning at a time of economic distress women and Black women are the first to be picked off in organisations and institutions."

"It was terrible to begin with. The pandemic means fewer opportunities overall - and thus, even fewer jobs for women."

"Theatres will want quick wins. ie. Big names in small plays/casts of 2-3 meaning less jobs for an industry that already is biased towards men."

"Its getting worse not better and covid has shone a huge flashlight on inequalities that are hard to shift and we are relying on many leaders who don't know how to enact change to change."

"Because women will have faced even more of a setback."

"Studies during the pandemic have already shown that more women than men have lost work and with fewer opportunities at least initially overall I feel this will only worsen."

"Because statistically women have upped the hours of caring and domestic duties. They are more likely to have found employment in sectors which won't allow time away for acting/creating."

"I'm worried that we'll just 'go back to normal' and normal just means that white cis males still had the loudest voices and most opportunity. I produce for female led new writing so am trying to address this balance but without support it's going to get harder."

"Because statistically women have upped the hours of caring and domestic duties.They are more likely to have found employment in sectors which won't allow time away for acting/creating."

"Because men are seen as a "safe bet".

"It's always easier to hire the people you've worked with before and to hire people who have fewer accommodation needs and need smaller pay."

"Theatres will want quick wins. ie. Big names in small plays/casts of 2-3 meaning less jobs for an industry that already is biased towards men."

"There are already far more women who want to be actors, and far fewer parts for women than men. Women have taken on more childcare during the pandemic, and so I imagine that statistically we have gotten less work. That means our CVs have mainly not gotten stronger for a year."

"Focus not on gender diversity at present. Older women still barely visible unless very well-known."

"Lots more women are needed at home with children. Less money means more women will be forced to look for more secure work."

"Because the majority of childcare and domestic duties have fallen to women, some of careers won't recover."

"For all the reasons mentioned above really. Women and mothers are disproportionately having to give up their work when their children or relatives need care."

"It's worrying because we are already fighting for women to be seen and for female stories to be produced even before the pandemic. Now will be about bums on seats and getting the old plays out there that are male heavy."

"Those that survive the pandemic and continue to work in theatre will have the finances to enable them too. Those who don't will ultimately leave to take on other work which is a great shame."

"Many women have ended up with additional caring responsibilities."

"Reduced budget meaning increased pressures to cover more roles and hours with one person. Often companies first turn to males for this in my profession. Pressure on females to find alternative employment that's more reliable/ secure currently."

"Because caring responsibilities tend to fall to women. But also because when shit hit the fan and jobs started to go theatres employed those they had pre existing relationships with and nine times out of ten that was the pale, male and stale status quo."

"Due to childcare and lower pay, meaning women are usually the ones forced to stop working. Other care duties might also change priorities for many, or simply push them out of the industry."

"The pandemic is a great excuse for all sorts of backtracking."

"Theatres will be looking to fill seats and make up lost money. To do that they will be less likely to take risks with their choices of shows, casts, teams etc, meaning they'll go with what they know which has traditionally been more male dominated."

"Because nothing ever really changes. We seem to have these "wins" for a bit, and then everything dies down, industry support dilutes, but the "old guard" still exists so to speak. There's large statements, but no action."

"Because the already small amount of working class people (I include myself in this bracket) will be pushed even further out. We have had to seek other jobs to care for our families and children, making it harder to get back into the tight knit circle which is only getting smaller as shows are so few and far between and funding even more competitive."

"More women are caring or have been set back by a return to the old boys network."

"There has always been a gender imbalance and we may go backwards."

"Because women get pulled in many directions... And have multiple priorities.. Project based work is unstable... People seek stability... People will be more risk adverse.."

"As an older woman in theatre there just aren't enough roles, even more so now when theatre companies are just getting back on their feet and don't have the option to employ multiple casts."

"People are likely to be playing it safe with guaranteed audience bait - and that tends to have more roles for men."

"Already an inequality. Austerity will only increase it."

"Because lots of woman have had to drop their jobs to take care of the children (usually because of inequality they earn more so some females had to sacrifice their jobs if not already taken). These jobs might not come back."

"I'm wary that a lot of theatres will return to more traditional narratives to ensure ticket sales, many of said traditional narratives are biased towards men."

"Childcare and other caring responsibilities fall disproportionately to women and a lack of financial support for freelance parents have put mothers and female freelancers in an unbalanced position of being. At present there isn't any funding / support to address this so the fallout will be felt."

"Because I'm concerned that all inequalities within the theatre industry will increase as a result of the pandemic. The structural support provided by the government and state is inadequate and the recovery of the economy is being prioritised over the recovery of society."

"The theatre industry is already very risk averse and very biased against women. Whilst I think there will be a surface engagement with 'representation' this is likely to increase in difficult financial times for many venues/ companies. Even if those venues/companies would like things to be different or set out with better intentions."

Key Findings
08

61% of women surveyed have thought about or are currently considering leaving working in theatre.

This unexpectedly high figure suggests action urgently needs to be taken to support women in theatre to prevent women leaving the industry.

39%
NO



61%
YES

Key Findings 09

In response to the open question about why respondents have considered or are considering leaving theatre, the most commonly cited reasons included:

1. Current problems regarding gender inequality in theatre being made worse by the pandemic
2. Being older/over age 40
3. Struggle to combine children and caring responsibilities with working in theatre
4. Finding it hard to return post-pandemic due to loss of work or confidence in the industry.

It is worth noting that issues regarding (1) caring responsibilities (2) ageism against those over the age of 40 and (3) the pandemic increasing gender inequality in theatre are recurrent concerns throughout the survey, suggesting these are urgent issues which need to be addressed.

Comments included:

"Although a trained theatre actress, I have struggled to find work in the sector as I get older. That, along with the fact that pay rates are appalling compared to recorded media, means I have more or less shifted to other sectors in the entertainment industry, including TV/film, games, and voiceover."

"Because having had a year out of work it has become difficult to afford."

"Financially instable - lack of opportunity - getting older, parts not being around."

"Needing a secure income to provide for family."

"Because our sector is too broken and inequalities are ingrained. The intersectionality of it all makes it a daily struggle that after years and years feels too hard."

"Because I've been on the receiving end of disrespectful treatment that I don't think happens in any other industry. And again I think women fall victim to that more often as we are easier targets."

"I'm not sure if I'll be able to sustain a career post pandemic, despite being in a good position beforehand where most of my income came from theatre. I also have caring responsibilities which don't always feel conducive with a freelance career."

"I'm not sure there will be enough work to sustain me as theatres begin to open. I am at a point in my life where I am looking for more stability."

"I have felt dispensable from the past year - from our government but also, sadly, the scottish theatre industry who I feel could have reached out more to their freelance community. I understand it was a struggle for everyone to keep going but I wish there had been more compassion towards preserving this workforce instead of only having to 'put out' work. At one point it felt like I could not wait it out, cannot wait for 'normal times', I needed help and support there and then. By this, I don't mean just a job. To have felt like there was a structure in place that I was part of (I have to say the Freelancers Make Theatre Work was a total shining light)."

"I am fighting to push through so many barriers (my age, gender, class and lack of any regional theatre in my area offering development support. It's exhausting!"

"It doesn't always feel sustainable, and especially right now I feel shut out of it and also creatively blocked due to the effects of losing my work and other aspects of the pandemic greatly affecting my mental health."

"It was already extremely difficult to make a living as a female director, once the pandemic hit it seemed almost impossible."

"Too much effort for too little recognition and sense of progress. Financial insecurity. Feeling like I'm too old to keep trying."

"It is such a struggle for survival, so yes I've thought about many other careers with better pay, 4 hours and benefits (such as a pension)."

"It feels on occasions especially at my age 39 that plays don't have great parts for women in my category. It's also so competitive and feels uphill. Trying to be seen for work can be challenging. After feeling so disposable and forgotten during the pandemic, it's hard to imagine returning to work. Also it feels like no one really cares about us. Theatres we previously worked for haven't reached out to actors which is sad."

"Forced to change industry because no jobs left in the theatre sector due to the pandemic."

"Out of touch with a lot of theatre industry/lack of opportunities for women over 45."

"Lost ability to make a living, this event and its repercussions will have put my career back several years and I feel that I have to make a decision between career or having a family due to my age etc."

"As things were starting back up it was still the same old system and favourites favoured, I just felt like I was drowning and now desperately trying to keep up with an industry that seems happy to forget me, and it's not financially or mentally viable anymore."

"I am the parent of a disabled child. My theatre job was cancelled as the pandemic took a hold and I've no idea when/if it will take place again."

"Because I'm a middle aged actress who whilst successful in the theatre till my early 40's I haven't had a job in theatre for 10 years. Institutions such as the RSC and the NT feel no compunction to support actresses who have given the first 20 years of their career to theatre. There is a sense you are only as good as your last job and if you've disappeared it's possibly because you aren't good enough as opposed to examining the lack of opportunity of parts for women in supporting roles. It would be great if the big institutions gave back to the wider work force of women in between jobs by offering professional development work or alike."

"Due to not feeling valued by my work. I work in engagement and I was treated like dirt because I worked with children and community groups. My argument is what is the point of theatre if we don't engage with these groups. But male ceos and artistic directors see our work as a burden and an inconvenience. The whole company felt like this due to the views of the people at the top. Some of the men wouldn't even acknowledge me in the corridor at work because of where I worked. As I've said I do believe this is gender discrimination due to the nature of the work."

"It has been a hard road already. It took years to build my career to the point it was at pre-pandemic. As a lower middle/working class woman, the financial impact of having to start again, in a more competitive world, feels an impossible task."

"The pandemic has made me realise how stressful this industry is and how it's damaging my mental health. The sad thing is that I'm middle class and have been given opportunities than other people. If I find it hard to survive in this industry, imagine working class women?"

"I'm completely burnt out - the barriers of sexism racism and ableism are too high."

Recommendations and Conclusion

WOMEN IN THEATRE SURVEY

These findings suggest that the following actions would be helpful:

- For the focus the pandemic has thrown on women taking on the majority of caring and domestic tasks responsibilities to be taken as an opportunity to address the issue of much of childcare and domestic tasks still falling on women via the setting up of a childcare and caring responsibilities support fund by Arts Council England, which would enable those with caring responsibilities to apply for support to facilitate work in the arts, and via specific action by the UK government more generally to provide support for women on this issue.
- For specific support to be provided to support older women in theatre (40+) by Arts Council England, which has been highlighted as an area urgently in need of redress. For specific support to be provided by the UK government on this issue more generally as well, for example in Australia the state of Victoria has provided $50 million support for women over the age of 45 in securing jobs post-pandemic in recognition of this group's increased challenges. For theatre organisations to consider what support they can provide in terms of this area as well.
- For the UK government and Arts Council England to take action to urgently increase awareness of gender bias and provide guidance on this issue to prevent an increase in gender inequality post pandemic.
- For specific support to help women recover from the pandemic to be provided by the government, Arts Council England and theatre organisations, for example in the form of quotas to bring about long-term change and prevent increased gender inequality and/or in the form of specific schemes, funding, training and job opportunities. This has been provided by other countries including Australia who have set aside in the state of Victoria alone $150 million to support women in coming back from the pandemic which includes funds for schemes, training, childcare support and new job opportunities.
- For staff working in theatre organisations and policymakers to urgently be trained on unconscious bias and using a gender lens and ensuring gender -balanced teams. For theatre organisations to provide guidance and training for staff on this issue.
- For mentoring and training to be provided to help women in theatre recover post-pandemic, for example respondents repeatedly highlighted issues of loss of confidence via being out of the industry during the pandemic due to caring responsibilities or loss of jobs.

Other counties such as Australia have provided specific support to help women recover post-pandemic and the findings from this survey suggest the same is urgently need to help women in theatre recover from the pandemic.

This is supported by studies such as the the University of Cambridge's study "Inequality In The Impact Of The Coronavirus Shock: Evidence From Real Time Surveys" (Adams-Prassl et al, 2020) which finds that women are one of the two hardest hit groups by the pandemic and states "overall, the results suggest that immediate action is required and that policies that aim to mitigate the shocks of the crisis should take into account the inequality in labor market impacts" and that "the results highlight the need for immediate policy responses that target those groups in the population that are most affected by the crisis."

We urge the UK government, Arts Council England and theatre organisations to provide urgent support for women to address the findings of this survey.

This report has been partnered by Sphinx Theatre, The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, the December Group, Equity, University Women in the Arts, ERA 50:50, and Stage Directors UK.

The report has been authored by Jennifer Tuckett, academic, Research and Literary Director at Sphinx Theatre, Director of University Women in the Arts, who has been a Lecturer and Senior Lecturer for over 10 years at universities around the world, as well as completing the world first major mixed methods study into how to improve the transition for women from studying the arts to working in the arts at the University of Cambridge and Sphinx Theatre's What Share of the Cake 2020 research reports and the Women in Theatre Forum Report in 2021. Sphinx Theatre is the UK's longest established women's theatre company.

WOMEN IN THEATRE SURVEY

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