

STAGE
DOOR

PiPA
Backstage
Workforce
Report

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PiPA

PARENTS & CARERS
IN PERFORMING ARTS


bectu

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PiPA Backstage Workforce Report

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1. Executive summary

The Backstage Workforce Survey carried out by Parents and Carers in Performing Arts revealed significant challenges for backstage workers – particularly women and those with caring responsibilities.

The high demands of job roles, unique working conditions and a lack of structured support create significant challenges for the workforce and potential risks for employers. A variety of flexible working options is being explored informally, on an ad-hoc basis, and appears to be benefiting a small minority. These options may favour those on permanent employment contracts, who are more likely to be male workers. It is recommended that organisational risk analyses be conducted and a code of best practice generated to support organisations in providing working structures, resources and flexible solutions that ensure backstage work is accessible for all.

The backstage workforce incorporates a wide range of jobs and roles. Participants in this research included all those who identify as backstage workers including, but not limited to, box office and front of house; production and stage crew; stage management; and costume and wardrobe. Lighting and sound departments are also included under the backstage workforce.

Imbalance between job demands and job resources

High job demands and a lack of job resources in backstage roles risk creating an ‘effort-reward’ imbalance, affecting worker engagement and increasing the risk of attrition. Participants reported a strong desire for increased flexibility and more manageable schedules than those currently available. Flexibility and autonomy are deployed in other industries to buffer the damaging effects of high job demands. The aim is to make work demands more manageable, but our survey found that such strategies in backstage work are limited.

Backstage workers who are also carers and parents said the lack of time outside work centred on work responsibilities spilling over into home life. There were very few examples of family responsibilities spilling over into work time. Parents and carers reported more issues around money and exhaustion than non-carers.

Lack of control and autonomy over working hours and role was a significant push factor for people leaving the sector. Therefore, an urgent review of job demands and new strategies to increase job resources is called for.

Overtime a key barrier to full-time work for primary carers

Production weeks were highlighted as a significant pinch point for carers and parents working backstage, who struggle to manage the extreme working hours and overtime requirements. Seven out of ten respondents said they received no support. The Working Time Directive (WTD) sets a maximum working week of 48 hours, but employers may ask workers to opt out from its provisions by signing an opt-out agreement. Workers who opt out of the WTD in contracts, or who work under buy-outs, face compulsory overtime with no

cap on hours. It is possible to combine a full-time backstage role with caring responsibilities, but opting out of the WTD makes it precarious for parents and carers. Lack of control over working hours and schedules was identified, predominantly by women, as a significant deterrent from taking full-time work. For both male and female workers with caring responsibilities, opting out of the WTD requires access to significant personal resources and social capital in order to balance work and family commitments. More than six-in-10 (64%) of respondents who had opted out of the WTD were not aware of their right to opt back in.

Risk of disaffected workforce

Concerns around work-life balance are not currently being effectively addressed in the workplace. Almost half of respondents did not raise their issues about work-life balance with their employers because they were concerned it would either affect their employment or not lead to positive change. Of those who did raise their issues with their employers, fewer than one in ten reported positive changes. Dialogue and negotiation between employees, freelancers and managers about work-life balance and flexible working issues rarely resulted in positive outcomes. Focus groups revealed instances of bullying, suggesting that cultural and gendered aspects of working cultures backstage may contribute to unprofessional behaviour. This may further inhibit workers, particularly those on temporary or zero hours contracts, from raising work-life balance issues with their employer. Further investigation to identify strategies for confidential and effective communication between workers and management, supported by a framework of interventions to ensure concerns are addressed, is urgently needed.

Gender impact

Working conditions backstage have a different, but equally challenging, impact on both male and female workers with caring responsibilities.

Women working backstage are more likely to be freelance or on temporary, show and zero hours contracts. These working structures may lack support, security, autonomy and can present barriers to career progression. The trade-off for many is the perceived flexibility and part-time hours that may allow women to manage work and family commitments. This correlates with this report's findings that women would welcome all and any forms of flexible working options that would support their work-life commitments.

Women are almost three times as likely as men to have had to change jobs due to caring responsibilities. Their most significant challenge is finding and affording childcare in order to meet extended and out-of-hours working. This reinforces previous PiPA research which found that 79% of female respondents¹ identified themselves as the primary carer in the family.

Male respondents identified exhaustion and time-based conflict as their key challenges. They were more likely to work on full-time contracts and most frequently cited the need for improvements to working practices, including better planning and scheduling, management of overtime, pay and staffing. As males increasingly seek to take a more active role in family commitments, this is currently not supported in backstage working structures.

Conclusions and implications

The PiPA Backstage Workers Survey has uncovered risks, both physical and psychosocial, for the workforce with implications for employers. High job demands, including long hours and unclear expectations around scheduling, are common. Common working practices make it hard for workers to have a good work-life balance. For carers in particular, the data highlights that, unlike many other sectors, it is logistically challenging to be a primary carer and have a full-time contract in the backstage sector. Limited flexibility, low support and little to no control or autonomy over ways of working indicate that workers are at risk of stress, in particular when juggling job demands with responsibilities outside of the workplace. Given that backstage work will always involve challenges, such as intense work periods and out of hours working, creative solutions are needed. The long hours and unpredictability translate into a working environment that is demanding for all workers – carers and non-carers alike. Diversity and work culture issues need to be addressed urgently, as men and women are each affected in different ways.

Recommendations

1. Monitor work demands

More backstage workforce monitoring would help to better understand current work demands and risks.

Risk and safety audits using established frameworks such as the Health and Safety Executive's standards, are recommended to inform activities to implement better and safer working practices.

2. Improve channels of communication

Improved lines of communication between management and backstage workers would encourage dialogue and transparency about the challenges experienced by the workforce and help identify support strategies. This could include staff surveys and focus groups.

3. Focus on positive role modelling

A focus on positive role modelling and visibly promoting, practising and celebrating work-life balance could encourage workers, especially those with caring responsibilities or those planning for a future family, to pursue a long term career in backstage work.

4. Improve work scheduling and flexibility

More support around, and access to, flexible work opportunities, better coordination of resources during busy periods and advanced and effective scheduling can further support backstage workers, particularly those with caring responsibilities, to mitigate work-life demands.



**"I want to stay in
the industry but I'm
really worried about
how many hours
I'd have to work"**

**Anonymous
survey respondent**

2. Survey results

The context: workforce challenges in the Performing Arts

Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA) is committed to focusing on the best ways to support people with caring responsibilities in the performing arts, and to provide robust data to inform best practice. The PiPA Balancing Act report published in 2019 revealed that work in the sector is precarious, with 54% working on short-term, zero hours or freelance contracts¹. Work structures in the performing arts are ad hoc and unpredictable, resulting in many challenges, especially for those with caring responsibilities. Parents and carers in the sector receive on average 13% lower pay than those without caring responsibilities and are more likely to report that their basic needs are not being met by their earnings¹. Lack of access to flexible work and ad-hoc, affordable, out of hours child or elder care are key barriers to gainful employment which reflects people's skills and training.

The Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector² found that only 18% of backstage workers reported having childcare responsibilities, indicating a potential under-representation of parents and carers in the theatre sector² workforce. In this study, parents and carers made up 41% of the sample, and 34% were looking after children under 18. Whilst this is consistent with the proportion of working parents in the UK, where 40% of the economically active population of the UK have childcare responsibilities and one in eight will be a carer^{3,4}, this may be indicative of a potential sampling bias whereby parents of children were more likely to complete the PiPA survey due to the topic, rather than a proportional representation of carers and parents in the sector.

In order to understand more about the unique challenges facing backstage workers with respect to parenting and caring responsibilities, in July 2019 PiPA collaborated with the backstage workers trade union Bectu to conduct a national survey. PiPA also conducted a series of focus groups with backstage workers to gain a deeper understanding of the issues affecting them. The research aimed to investigate:

- The specific challenges faced by parents and carers working backstage, in particular during busy production periods, and the implications for career development and well-being
- Whether challenges are experienced differently by those with and without caring responsibilities and by both males and females
- What strategies and solutions exist that support parents and carers working backstage, including work structures, best practice and the negotiation of solutions.

Backstage workers survey

The following sections summarise the key findings from the survey and focus groups.

Demographics

338 backstage workers participated in the survey, primarily via the BECTU trade union, social media and PiPA Partner organisations. We show the breakdown by gender and work status in **Figure 1**, below.

The even gender split of 51% female is in line with the Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector² that reported female participants at 49%² and reflects that the backstage workforce population is more 'male' than wider theatre samples. For example, previous PiPA research had 70% female in Balancing Act¹ and 74% in the Best Practice Charter⁵ research project, both of which were general theatre workforce surveys.

Figure 1. Sample demographics

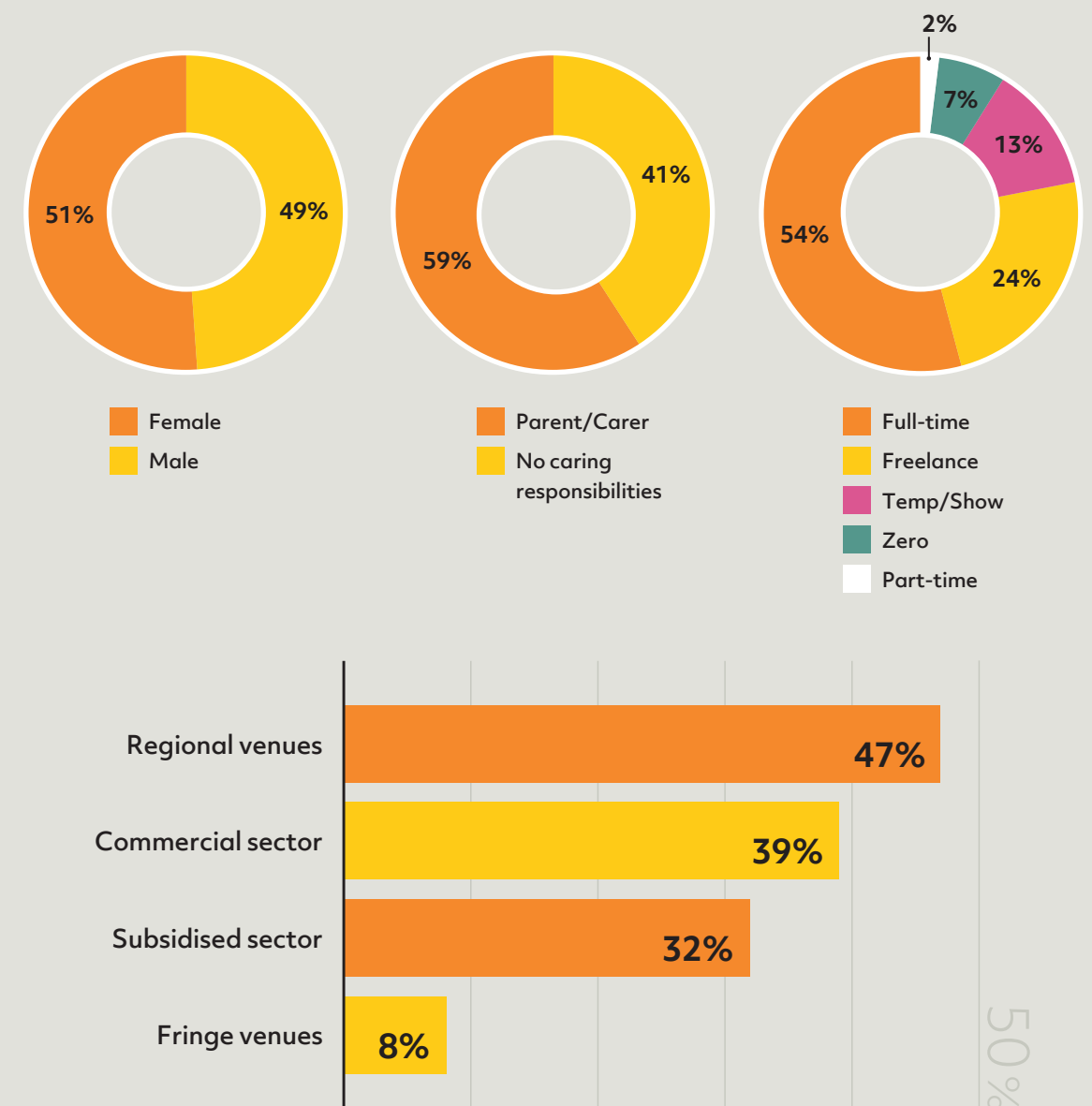


Figure 2. Percentage of males and females by employment type (n=330)

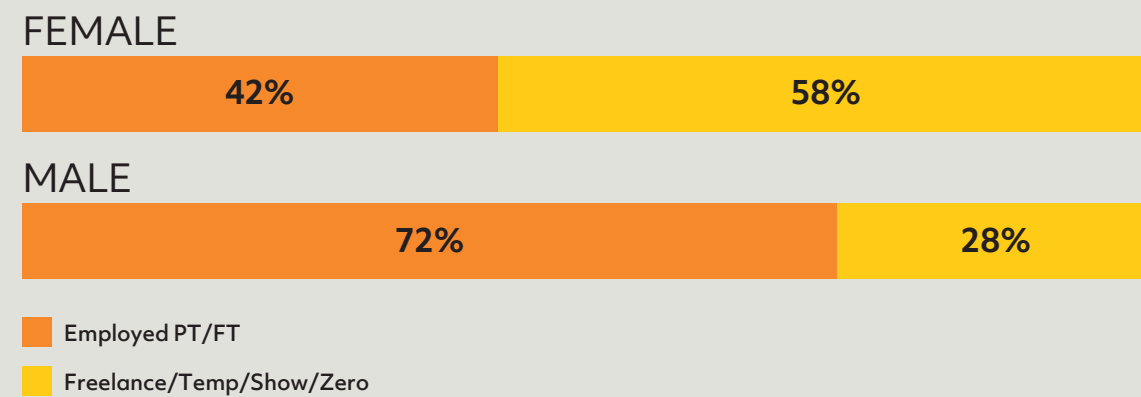


Figure 3. Percentage of parents and carers by gender (n=332)

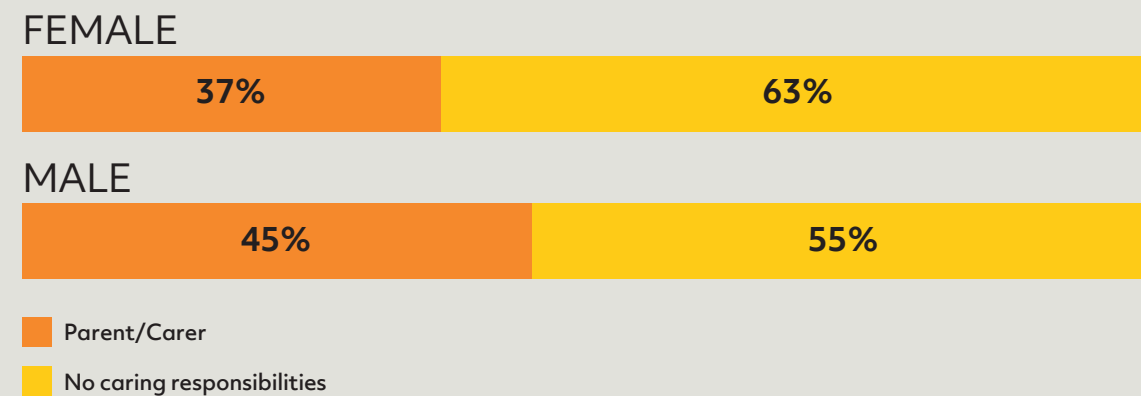
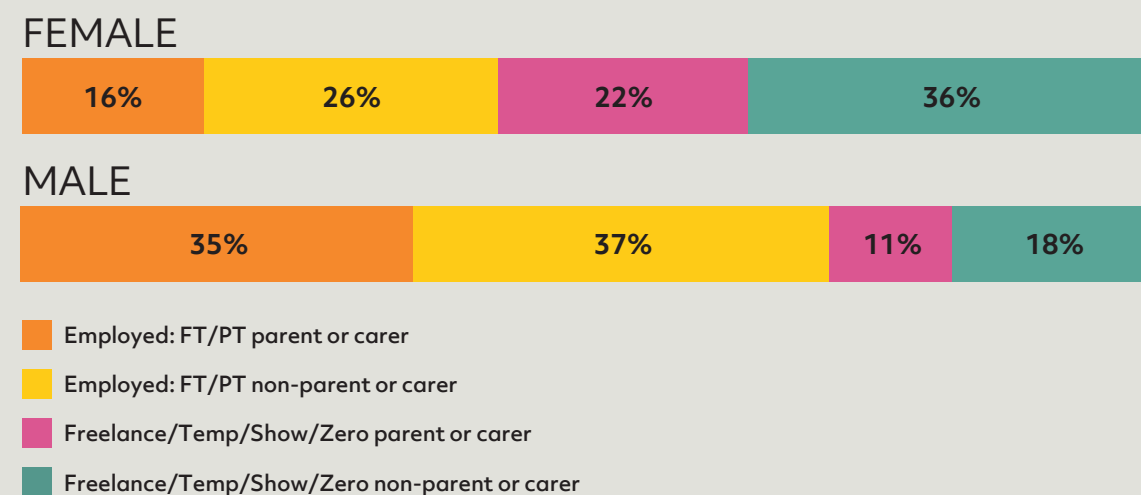


Figure 4. Employment type and caring responsibilities by gender (n=332)



The proportion of backstage workers employed on full-time contracts was 54% which is lower than the national average (74%)³ but higher than figures in the Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector² which put the percentage at 42%. One consideration could be the recruitment channels for the survey which was disseminated through PiPA Partners, predominantly employers, whose reach and impact will be strongest with direct employees.

Alongside the survey we conducted three focus groups (14-25 participants) with a wide range of backstage workers.

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of gender by contract type and caring responsibility.

Men are more likely to be employed (72%) and women are more likely to be freelance (58%). Women were twice as likely than men to be freelancing or on temporary, zero-hours or show contracts. This association between gender and employment type was also reflected in the focus groups, where the majority of male workers worked under full-time employment contracts.

It is notable that the 2018 PiPA Best Practice research project reported 51% of men to be employed, and 41% of women⁵, across a wider sample of participants. This sample reports almost identical data for employed females but significantly more males (72% vs 51% across the wider sector) are employed, suggesting that gender plays a major role in the way employment patterns of men and women differ in backstage roles.

When we asked the backstage workers about their caring responsibilities, male respondents were more likely to have caring responsibilities than females (**Figure 3**).

It is notable therefore that **Figure 4** demonstrates that female workers with caring responsibilities were more likely to work on freelance contracts than male workers with caring responsibilities.

This highlights again the association between gender and employment type; male workers with caring responsibilities are over twice as likely (35%) as female workers with caring responsibilities (16%) to be employed. Female workers with caring responsibilities are twice as likely to be freelancers (22%) than male parents and carers (11%). Male employed workers include almost equal numbers of carers and non-carers (35% versus 37% of total males in sample), however for women, almost two thirds of employed workers are non-parents or carers (26% vs 16% of total females). It suggests that primary caring responsibilities may impact employment patterns for males and females in different ways.

This association between gender and employment type may be explained by the fact that women are more likely to take on primary caring responsibilities, reflected in their move away from full-time or permanent contracts:

"I returned to freelancing when I had to care for my Mum – less pay and unpredictable, but the choice of whether to apply for jobs and work short contracts fitted better with life."

(A full account of gender effects in this study is given from page 30.)

Working practices

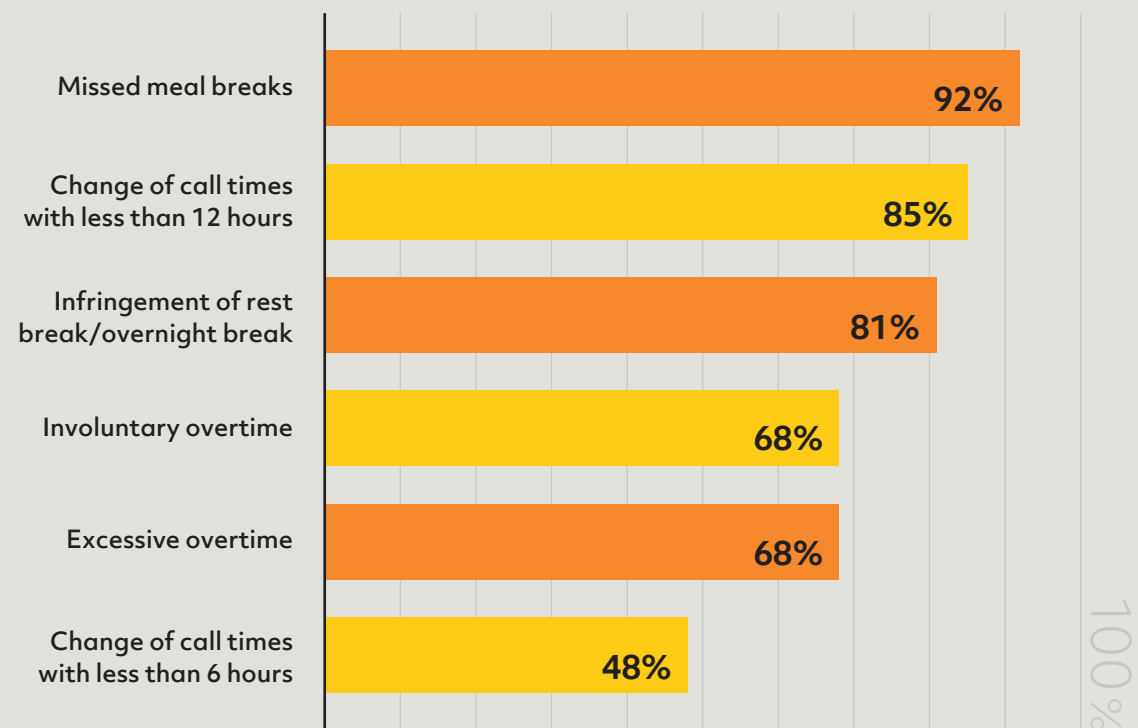
This section focuses on backstage working practices in order to understand the potential impact on people's work-life balance. Work-life balance is a broad and important concept that describes how individuals manage, and are satisfied with, aspects of their work and private lives, including family, caring responsibilities and leisure time. There is no agreed standard of 'good' work-life balance, rather it is important that individuals have arrangements which they feel fit their needs. It is necessary that work, with all its demands, is an aspect of life that does not deplete people of time and energy to engage in life outside work.

Challenges working backstage

The survey included a question about what challenges people experienced when working backstage, and participants were asked to select as many options as were applicable (**Figure 5**).

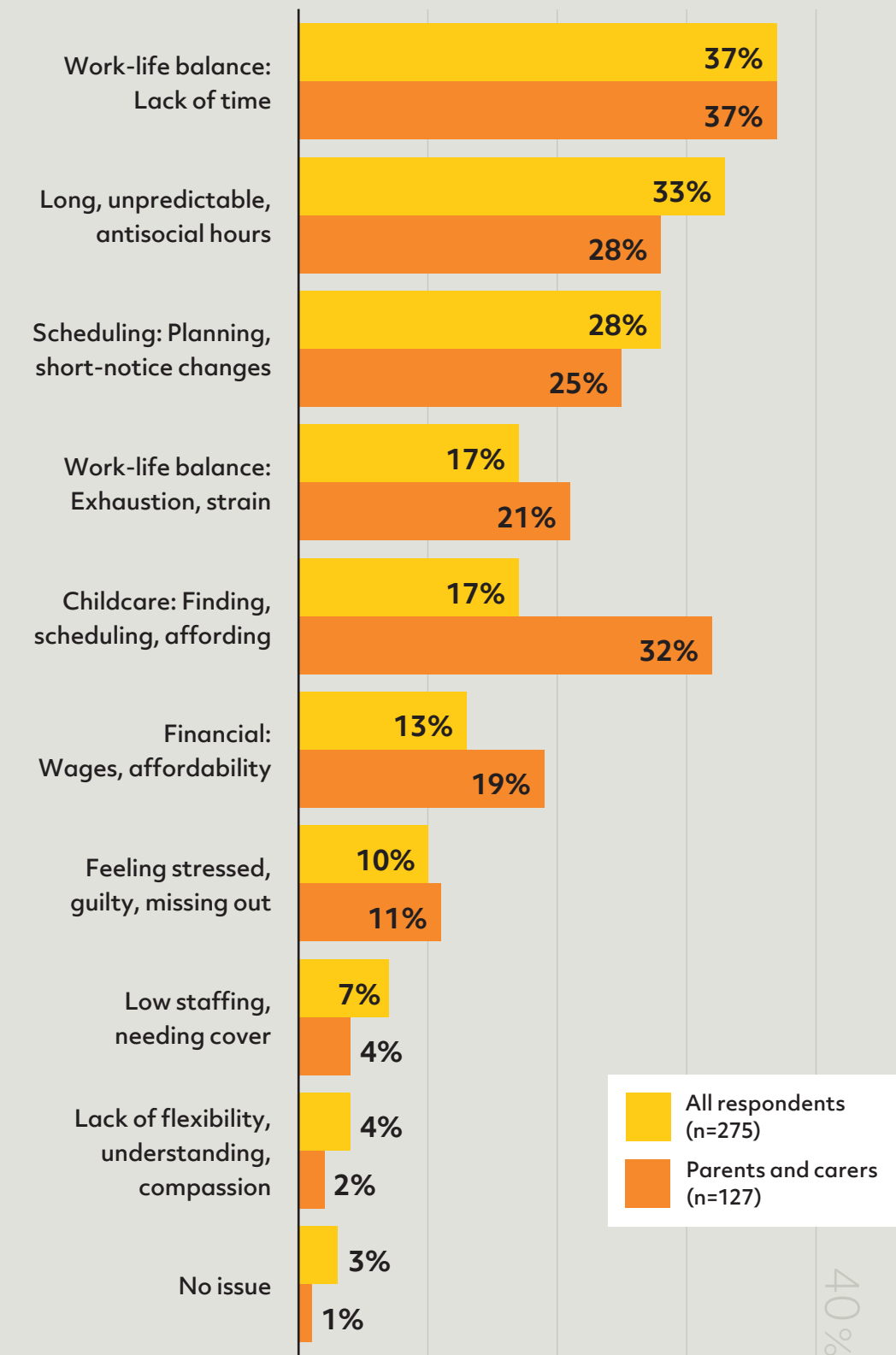
When asked about specific challenges faced when trying to meet work and family commitments (**Figure 6**), long, unpredictable, anti-social hours and last minute scheduling changes were the major challenges reported.

Figure 5. Challenges experienced working backstage (n=318)*



* Fixed response question. Percentages sum to >100% as participants selected as many options as applied to them. Whole sample.

Figure 6. What are the three biggest challenges you face when trying to combine family responsibilities with your work commitments?*



* Percentages sum to >100% as participants described as many options as applied to them.

Everyone reported the same pattern of work-based challenges, in particular long hours and unpredictable scheduling. Parents reported more issues around money and exhaustion and said that finding, scheduling and affording childcare is a significant challenge:

“I rarely see my wife as we need to work opposite hours to cover childcare or one of us often works day and night. My wife will soon begin a 15-month contract where she will work Saturday and Sundays (Tuesdays off). The only time she’ll see our daughter for over a year is at breakfast in the weekdays and for some of the morning on weekends. [...] The pressure lands on myself and our child. Night time childcare is just so expensive.”

Carers reported slightly fewer challenges around lack of time, antisocial hours and scheduling. This may be because carers and parents are less likely to be employed full-time and have therefore already compensated for the lack of time reported by those without caring responsibilities.

Typical work schedules and lack of breaks leads to further personal cost in the form of mental exhaustion and stress from juggling work and family commitments:

“Only being home for approx two hours between calls (excluding travel and sleep) when working to an 11 hour overnight break. This doesn’t leave enough time to eat, wash, relax, complete home admin or see family.”

Parents-to-be and prospective carers spoke of concerns that their desire to progress will be in conflict with their situation at home, having witnessed others around them struggle when it comes to combining professional success with family life:

“I want to progress to become a senior technician but it’s tricky because I also want to have kids. I want to stay in the industry but I’m really worried about how many hours I’d have to work.”

The lack of time described by backstage workers, most notably carers and parents, centred on work responsibilities spilling over into home life. This can be termed ‘work in family’ conflict⁶. There were very few examples of family responsibilities spilling over into work time (‘family in work’ conflict).

Focus group discussions provided deeper insights into the demands of backstage work for parents and carers, with many descriptions of challenging hours and scheduling. The expectation to work overtime was found to have a profound impact on those with caring responsibilities, especially freelancers who rely on different jobs for income:

“Following a change of employer in the same industry the additional contractual overtime meant requiring extra child care for overlaps between myself and my wife’s schedule and meant my giving up other avenues of employment.”

Extended hours contribute to an irregular and extended working week, for example, having to work a Saturday night get-out, and then do a Monday morning get-in, resulting in

insufficient rest on Sunday before the following week. Another example was needing to get up with children at 7am after having to do a late-night get-out (i.e. once the show is down).

Many spoke of the concept that ‘theatre is your life’, suggesting that work demands take precedence over those of life outside work:

“My mum recently had cancer treatment and I would have liked to have been there for her immediately post operation but as I was in rehearsal on a show and the schedule was tight it was difficult to get time. The company was nice about it but I feel generally that unless its an emergency scenario it is very inconvenient for stage management to have a personal life or family life whilst on a contract.”

It is interesting to note that when part-time and show contract focus group participants were asked ‘would you consider working full-time and if not why not?’ the majority said they would not, primarily due to the long hours required. The issue of long hours was a strong concern for female participants in particular. The group discussed the impact of full-time work on work-life balance. The full-time workers in the group reported that their hours could go up to 60 or 70 on busy tech weeks. This is one of the main deterrents for women who are freelancing, when considering applying for full-time job opportunities. In line with the recommendations behind the European Working Time directive to work no more than 48 hours per week on average, it is likely such hours are not sustainable in the long term.

Production period

The period before a show opens, production week and technical week, has been highlighted as a particular pinch-point in the production timetable which often entails extreme working hours, tight deadlines and increase in stress levels for those involved. Participants identified the requirement to work overtime, as well as the extended hours associated with production weeks, as major contributors to irregular and extended working weeks.

Figure 7. Proportion of parents and carers receiving support to help with caring responsibilities during busy production periods (n=129)

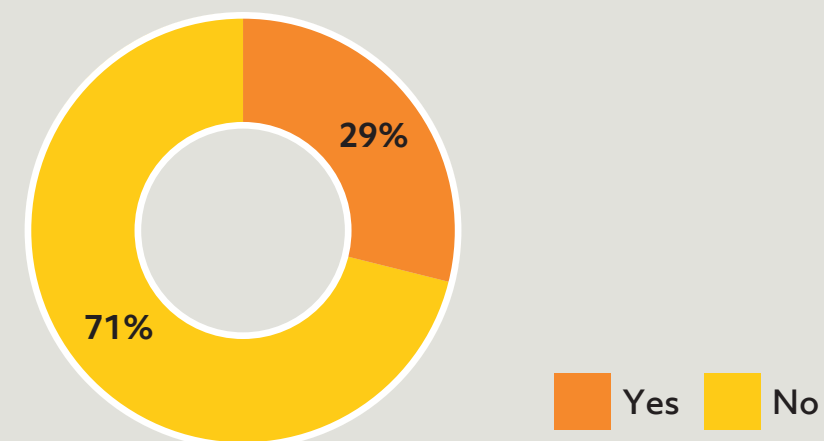
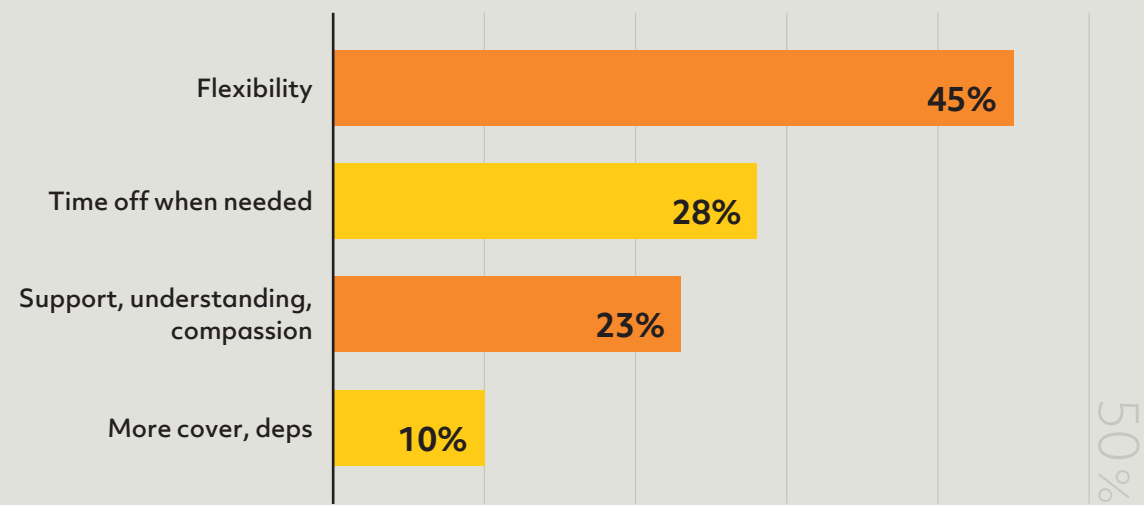


Figure 8. What support did you receive during production periods? (n=40)*



* % sum to >100% as more than one code permissible for each response.

Parents and carers were asked whether they had received any support to help with caring responsibilities during busy production periods (Figure 7, page 17).

When asked what the greatest challenges were, several participants reported production weeks as being the most challenging:

“Having to juggle child care especially during turnarounds and production periods. Having calls changed or cancelled with no notice when child care has been arranged is the hardest. Also the most costly.”

“I’m terrified of my kids being very ill when I’m at work, and needing to leave during a production week – would be a nightmare. This really scares me, each time I have a production week coming up.”

71% of parents and carers reported that they had not received any support to help with caring responsibilities during production periods. Of those who had received support during production weeks, 29% of parents and carers (12% of the total sample) described what kinds of support were made available (Figure 8).

Only 5% of the overall sample had experienced any kind of support during production week. Of those, nearly half had experienced some flexibility around hours. Other forms of support included being allowed time off when it was needed or at short notice. Most did not specify if this was paid or unpaid leave, but one participant explained that their employer had arranged a dep to cover their absence, whilst another confirmed paid leave. Others benefitted from a level of understanding and compassion from colleagues.

Flexible working

Since 2014, all employees (not just parents and carers) have had the right to request flexible working after 26 weeks continuous employment⁷. Recent industry data has shown that 54% of the UK workforce work flexibly in some way, but that there are inequalities when it comes to accessing flexible working and significant gender differences⁸. The Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector² highlighted “antiquated attitudes to flexible working, which particularly affects workers (often female workers) with caring responsibilities of all types”.

34% of participants had experienced some form of flexibility within their department (Figure 9).

Workers who had experience of flexible working in their department were asked to describe what types of flexible working they had experienced (Figure 10, page 20).

64% of this minority sub-set (representing 20% of the total sample) described flexibility of hours or shifts, or the option of working from home. This data includes direct personal experience as well as observed experience of colleagues. 23% reported better scheduling, or time off in lieu. There were also reports of swapping, staggering or alternating shifts which reinforces the predominantly informal nature of these arrangements:

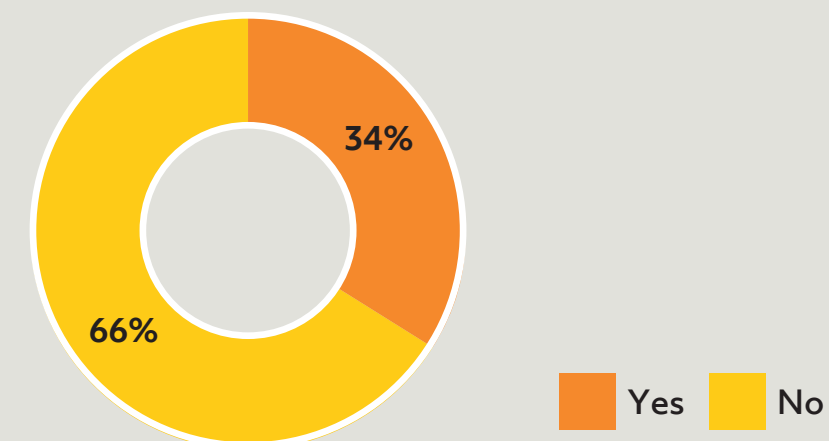
“Sometimes I’m able to work around the school hours, doing 10-3 and then 8pm-11pm”

“Our DSM got Fridays off in order to get an extra evening with her young child”

“Hours are allocated where needed and there is lots of flexibility to move them if schedules change or jobs are finished earlier”

“Three person team sharing show operation responsibilities allows flexibility, working from home on various days”

Figure 9. Have you ever experienced flexible working within your department? (n=331)



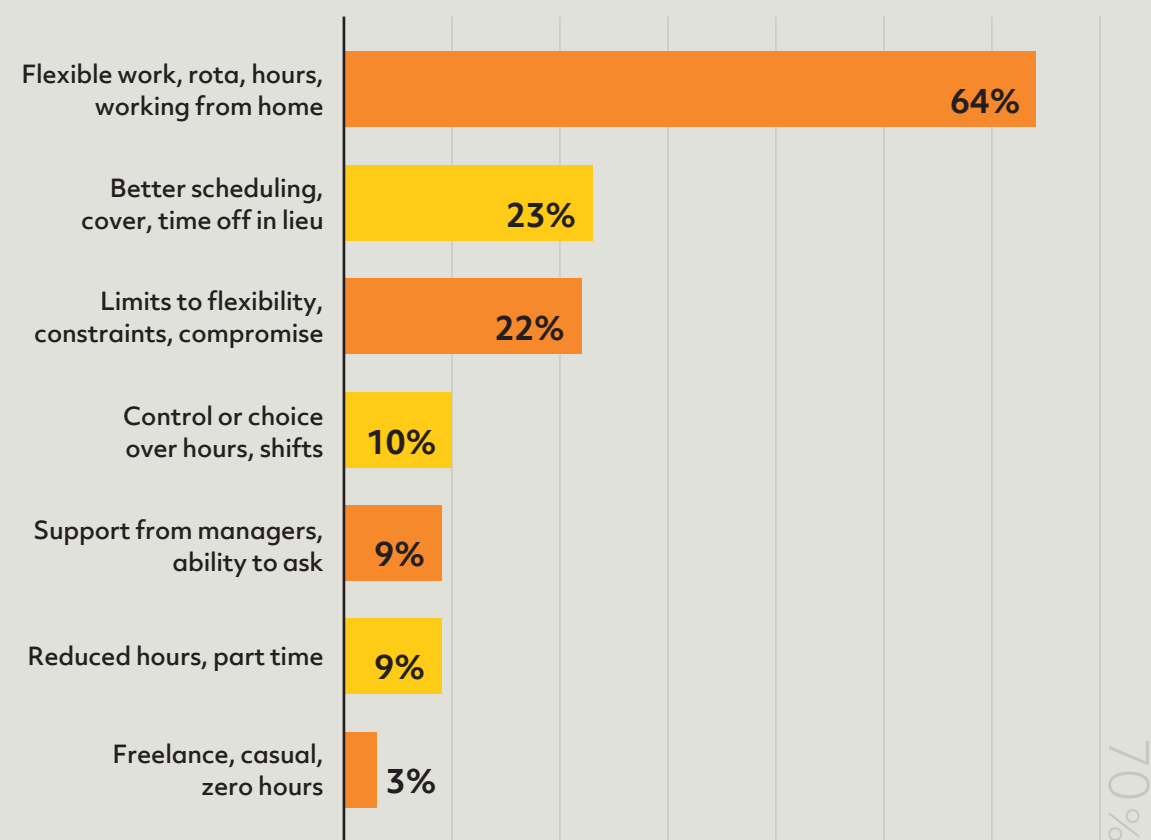
The proportion of backstage workers with formal flexible working arrangements in place is likely to be significantly lower than in the general population. This is due in part to a high proportion of freelance, short-term contract and zero hours workers who would not meet the eligibility criteria of 26 continuous weeks' employment in order to be able to make a flexible working application. However, a landmark new clause added in the 2019 SOLT / Equity West-End Agreement¹⁵ states that management will carefully and sympathetically consider any requests for flexible working, including job shares. This is indicative of increasing recognition and commitment to support the parent and carer workforce.

Focus groups reported that flexibility in the workplace was predominantly at the discretion of the Head of Department and dependent on working within a supportive department. This is confirmed by anecdotal evidence from survey participants:

"I try to encourage HODs to spread extra hours like rehearsal calls and maintenance evenly."

"My boss will allow me to call casuals to cover my shifts if needed."

Figure 10. Experiences of flexible working (n=103)*



*% sum to >100% as participants selected as many as were applicable.

"We have three parents within our department and we were on flexible working at some point... two members did a job share. We had a very understanding HOD (female)."

"I have implemented new schedules for technicians during production weeks. Giving them a night off over the 6 days worked. I also allow flexible scheduling during normal weeks to allow for a life outside of the theatre."

Departmental culture, attitude and ability to self-organise is also a key component:

"The department can vary timing of hours worked as requires amongst ourselves."

"Not officially but somewhat worked out between the team ie: allowed to come in later for showcall on certain days, alternating understudy rehearsals."

22% reported perceived limits on flexibility, notably during production weeks and touring, for example:

"I do admin from home but when touring it can't be flexible."

"Outside of production periods, there have been times when work can be flexible. During production periods, this is almost never the case."

Other limits included flexibility being offered during show weeks but not tech weeks, or flexibility only being possible if someone else is able to take on the extra shifts. There was also evidence that the inflexibility of production periods would continue to be a challenge, even if flexibility were introduced at other times:

"Taking time back after busy production periods, not really that flexible as production schedules are set so 60-70 hour weeks followed by shorter weeks is not the flexibility that is required as a parent."

Changing jobs

The PiPA Best Practice research project identified that 57% of employed workers and 81% of self-employed workers had turned down work due to caring responsibilities, and that support for changing or adapting roles was low⁵. We also asked backstage workers about their experiences changing jobs due to caring responsibilities.

42% of parents and carers reported that they had changed jobs due to caring responsibilities (**Figure 11, page 22**). This represents 17% of the total sample, or one in six, and demonstrates a direct impact on career progression.

Overall 64% of females have had to change jobs due to caring responsibilities, but this figure is just 23% for men (**Figure 12, page 22**).

Figure 11. Have you had to change your job due to caring responsibilities? (n=138)

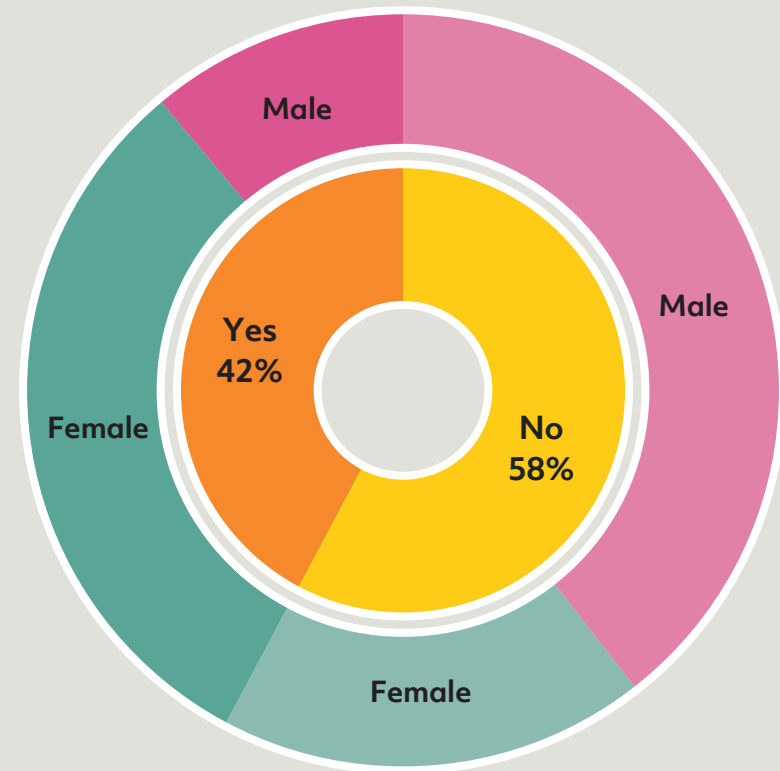


Figure 12. Have you had to change jobs due to caring responsibilities? (n=138)

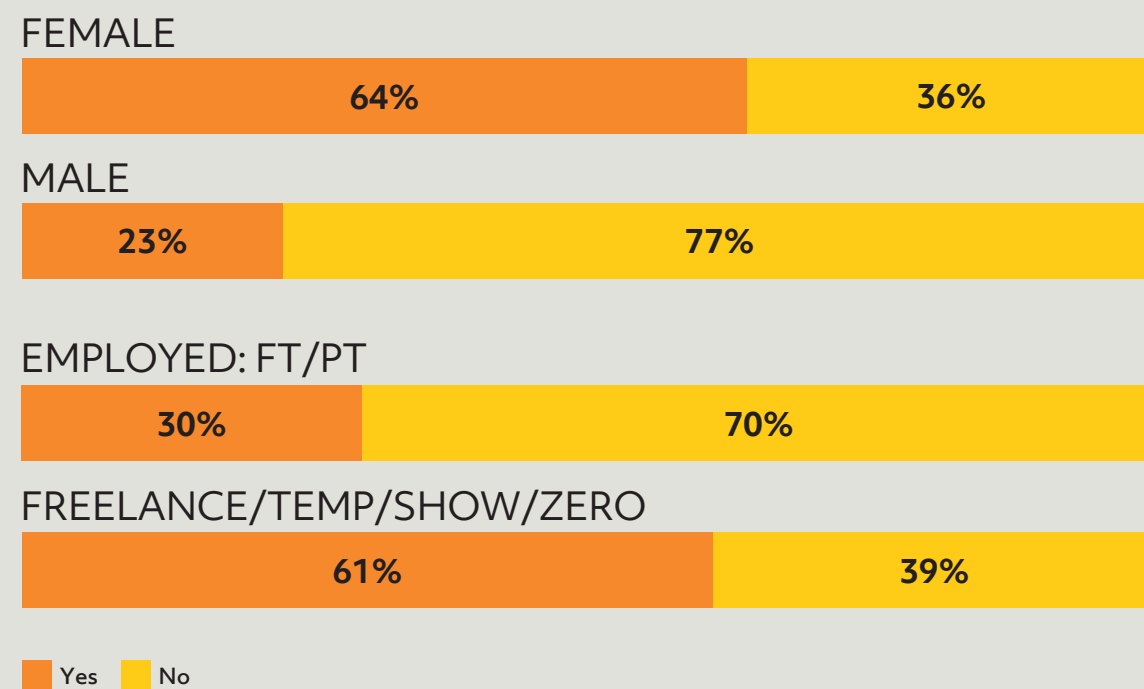
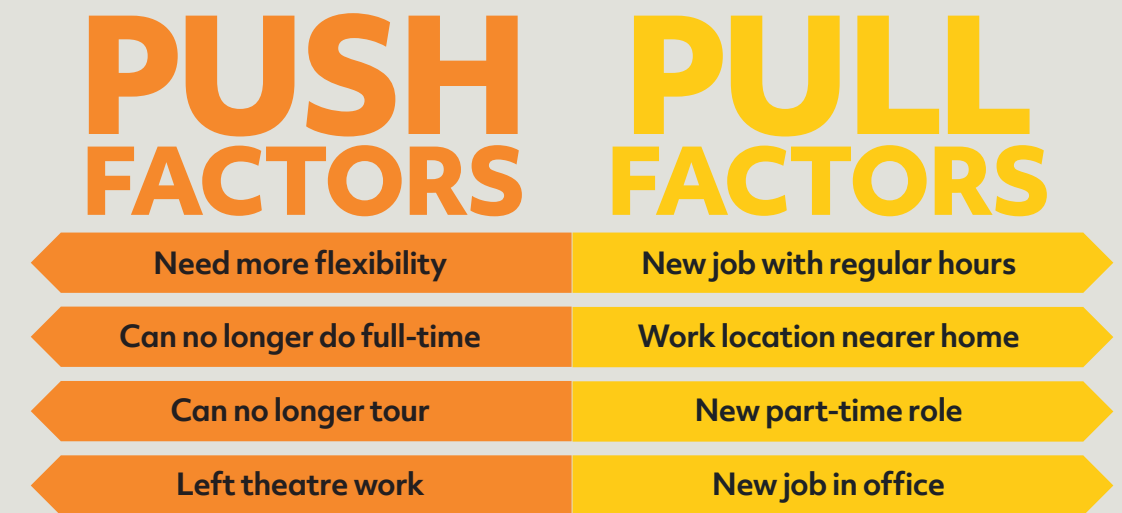


Figure 13. Reasons why parents and carers change jobs due to caring responsibilities (n= 55)



This could be because more males appear to be working on full-time contracts, which this study has shown to be a significant challenge when combined with caring responsibilities. Further investigation is required to fully understand the implications.

When asked, participants described a range of push and pull factors that influenced their motivations and job seeking behaviour (Figure 13).

Participants said that the most frequent reason for changing roles was the need to be more available for family. Specifically, lack of flexibility was a significant push factor, highlighted alongside a number of important pull factors described, such as desire for regular hours and work closer to home.

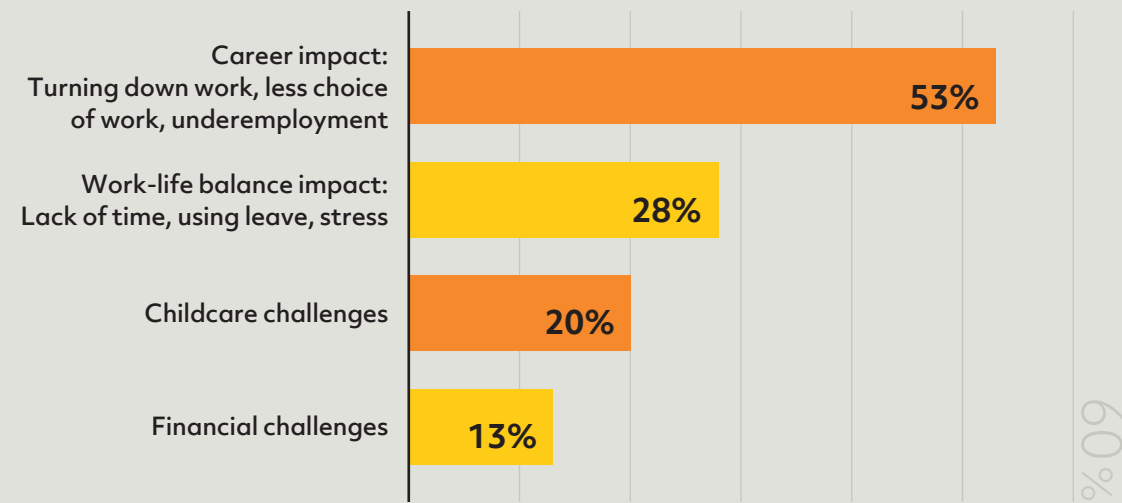
"I took a PGCE so could teach whilst children growing up. I found that working in the theatre was not conducive to having a family."

"The long hours often demanded by theatre companies of their stage management do not align with family life. I have had to pause my career at its height, because I have chosen to start a family."

Participants were asked to provide further information about the impact of caring responsibilities on their work, besides changing roles. Responses were free text and have been coded below (Figure 14, page 24).

53% of participants with caring responsibilities reported that these responsibilities had a direct impact on their career, such as having less choice or having to turn down work, needing employment closer to home, and no longer being able to tour or work full time:

Figure 14. Have your caring responsibilities impacted the way you work in any other way? (n=88) *



* Parents and carers only. % sum to >100% as multiple themes may be coded per response.

"I have now become freelance but struggle to find suitable work"

"I need to stick to specific hours, and can't be as accessible to companies as before."

"Can now no longer work as a stage manager."

28% of these parents and carers described work-life balance issues as a significant driver. These issues included not having enough time, having to use holiday or leave to take time off to look after their children and feelings of stress or anxiety:

"I use up most of my holidays making up the time that I am late because of dropping off my children."

"They have made me incredibly anxious and depressed that my job is not as readily flexible as it easily could be with more consideration and organisation."

"Higher stress levels needing to leave work when calls (work hours) extend/change unexpectedly."

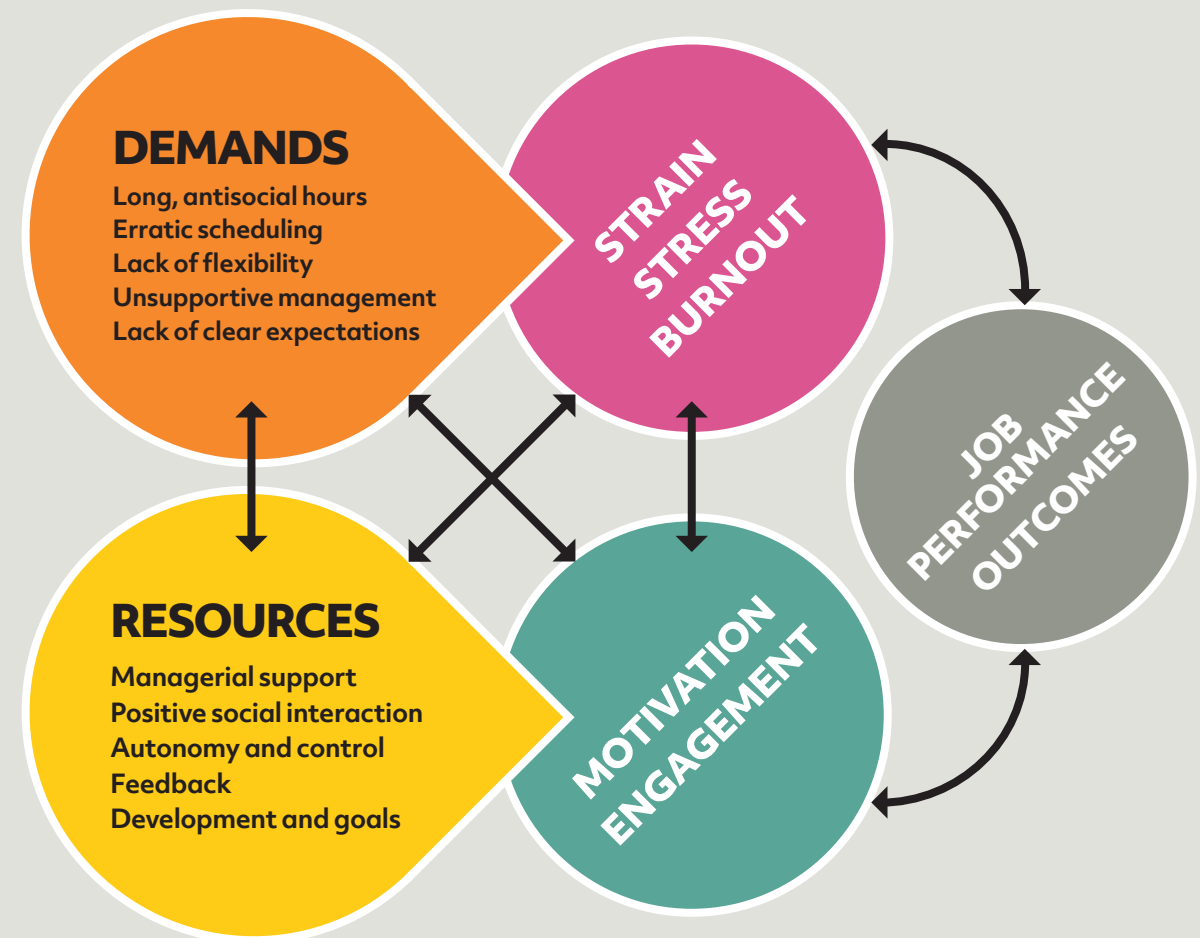
Several focus group participants believed they did not have a right to take unpaid leave or that it would negatively impact their future employment.

Working practices summary

Common working practices across backstage roles point to a context where high job demands and job insecurity are the norm and expectations are high. Parents and carers experience workplace challenges such as long hours, or unpredictable scheduling, causing a lack of time and poor work-life balance. These same challenges are also experienced by workers without caring responsibilities. However, these challenges are likely to be amplified for those who have more complex responsibilities outside work, including parenting or caring for an elderly or disabled family member.

The data indicated a lack of resources to mitigate against the extreme working hours and schedules. There is a lack of flexibility and autonomy over how workers are able to manage their time and work. In particular, this study suggests an imbalance of psychosocial aspects relating to how work is managed and whether expectations are clearly communicated (Figure 15). This carries the risk that workers become less motivated and engaged, and ultimately risks job performance. Combined with high job demands backstage, around long hours and unpredictability, workers risk feeling exhausted and stressed with a poor work-life balance¹⁰.

Figure 15. The Job Demands - Resources Model adapted from Demerouti et al. (2001)⁹



The detrimental impacts on life outside work are felt especially by those with caring responsibilities. Ongoing conflict between work and home life may negatively affect job performance, engagement and employee wellbeing in the long term, impact on relationships at home and risks attrition of valuable talent from the field, as parents and carers leave for job roles outside the theatre.

Work-life balance

Industry data has shown that cultural aspects of the workplace, such as management capabilities, expectations and attitudes, can affect the provision of flexible working options for employees¹¹ as well as legislation, such as the working time directive¹². It is important to consider the mechanisms regulating backstage working hours in order to identify the impact on work-life balance of worker.

Figure 16. Have you signed a working time opt out agreement?

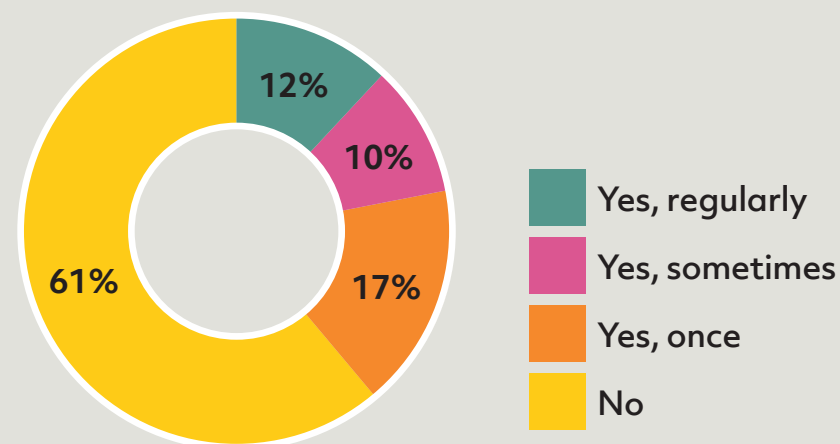
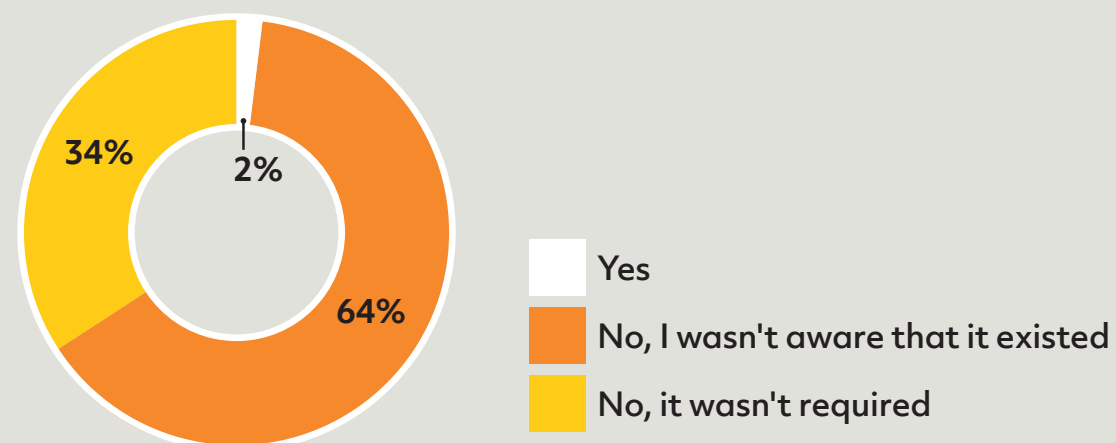


Figure 17. Did you exercise your right to opt back in?



Working Time Directive opt-out agreement

In the UK, the Working Time Directive (sometimes called the 'working time regulations') states that people may not work more than 48 hours a week on average over a period of 17 weeks¹². Workers can choose to work more by opting out¹² of the 48-hour week and signing an opt-out agreement.

The data shows that 39% of participants have opted out at least once (**Figure 16**). A key implication of opting out of the working time directive is that there is consequently no cap on hours that a worker can be required to work. Focus group participants, in particular women, frequently cited the hours worked by those in full-time roles as the main reason for not wanting to take full-time employment. Whilst someone with caring responsibilities might want to work full time, having to opt out of the WTD and the inherent lack of control over working hours and schedules backstage makes it too precarious for most. The full-time hours are themselves manageable but it's the compulsory overtime which becomes an insurmountable barrier:

"Before being a parent, [signing an opt out was] part of the culture. When priorities change, you realise the WTD is there for a reason."

The data revealed an inverse relationship between having been made to sign an opt-out agreement and having had to change a job due to caring: those who have had to change jobs due to caring were less likely to have had to sign an opt-out agreement. A potential explanation is that individuals seek new roles where signing an opt-out agreement is not required, although further research is required to fully investigate the connection. The present data supports the theory that seeking more predictable hours was the biggest pull factor when changing jobs.

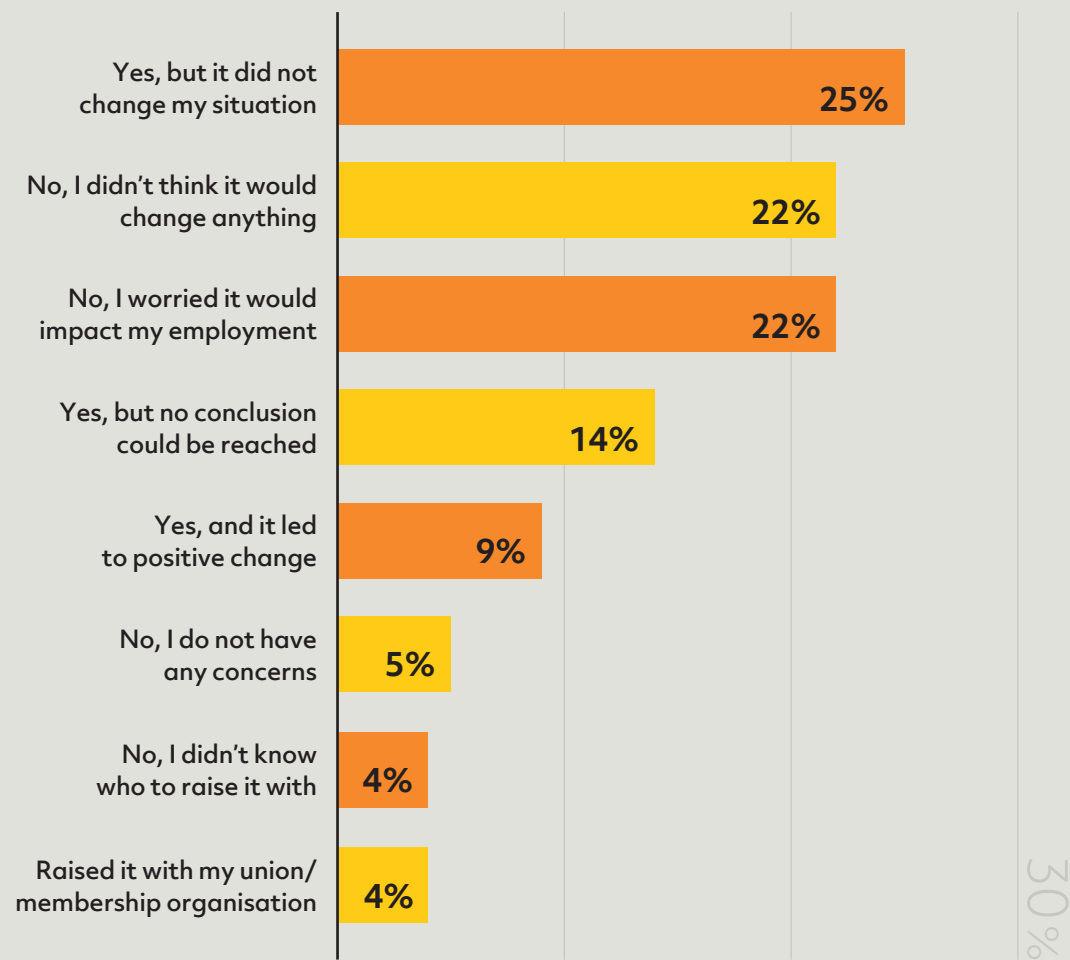
Having signed an opt-out agreement, a worker can write to their employer at any time saying that they wish to regain their rights under the working time directive. An opt-out agreement may contain a clause stipulating how long it will be before the reversal comes into effect. **Figure 17** shows that in this sample, only 2% had exercised this right. The remainder were unaware that this option existed (64%) or did not opt back in as it wasn't required (34%).

Working culture

All participants were asked if they had raised concerns about work-life balance with employers (**Figure 18, page 28**).

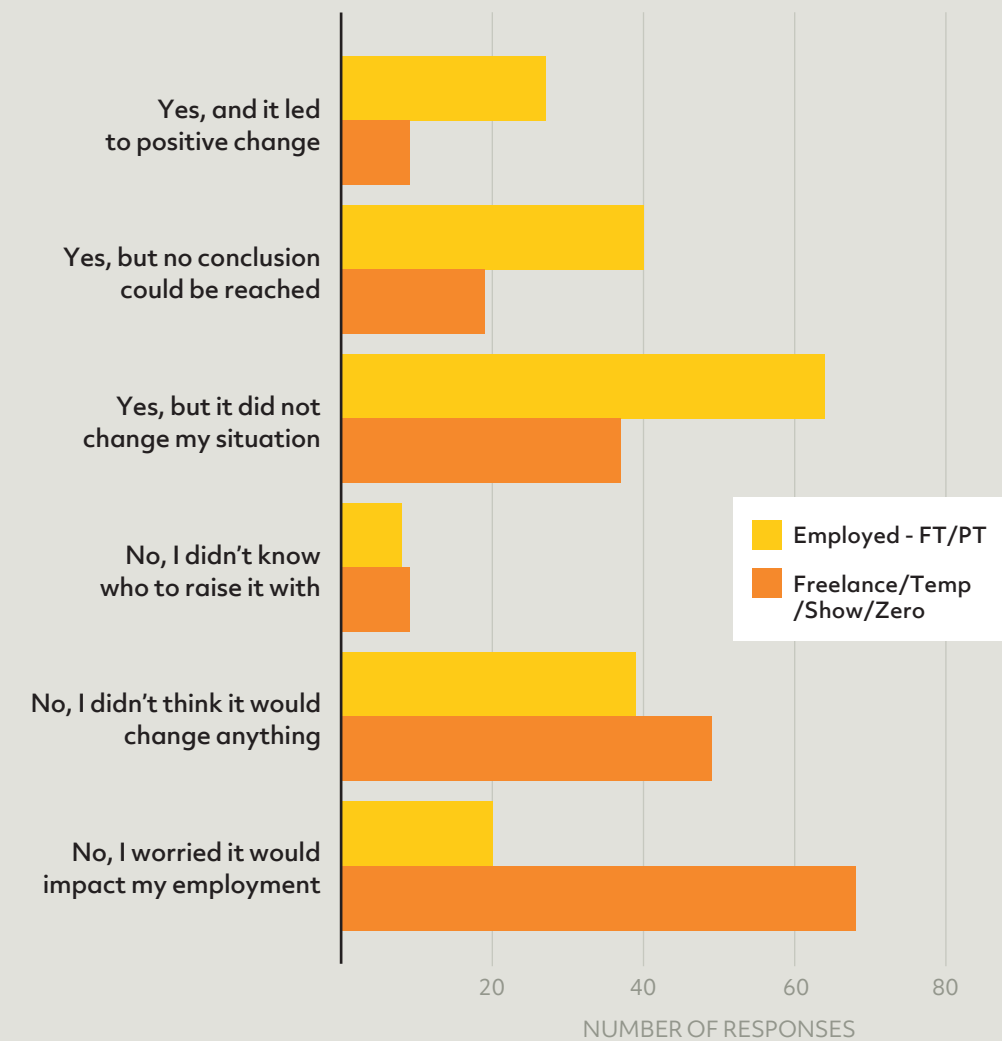
Overall, only 5% of the sample reported that they had no concerns about work-life balance. 48% of the sample reported raising concerns about work-life balance with employers and a further 4% had raised concerns with their unions. In total, 48% of instances of concern about work-life balance were therefore not raised with employers for various reasons (excluding 4% who raised concerns with unions). These reasons included being worried that raising issues would negatively impact their employment, that it wouldn't change anything anyway, or not knowing who to raise concerns with. 9% of respondents said they had raised concerns and had a positive outcome, and 39% reported that raising their concerns resulted in no change in situation or that no conclusion was reached. A breakdown by employment type is shown in **Figure 19 (page 29)**.

Figure 18. Have you ever raised your concerns regarding your work-life balance with your employer? (n=323)*



* Fixed-choice response question. 323 participants made 428 selections. Chart shows % of responses which sum to >100% as participants selected as many options as were applicable.

Figure 19. Experiences raising concerns about work-life balance with employers by employment type (n=323)*



* 187 employed full- or part-time: 143 freelancers, or on temporary, show or zero hours contracts.

The backstage workers employed on full- and part-time contracts more frequently reported raising concerns than freelancers and those on temporary, show or zero hours contracts. It is likely that formal employees benefit from longer-standing relationships with their employers, and therefore feel more empowered to raise concerns. Conversely, the majority of workers on precarious contracts were concerned that raising such issues might impact their work opportunities. It is notable that freelance workers were statistically more likely to be female and therefore the least likely to raise concerns.

It may be that workers on freelance contracts are likely to adopt more ad-hoc, informal methods of flexible working arrangements that are self-initiated (see page 19). The CIPD reports that this is an important factor. Informal flexibility¹⁷ enables greater control over the way work interacts with the rest of our lives, without requiring formal requests and approval

(and associated changes to contractual status)¹⁴. However, such negotiations rely on a positive relationship with line-managers and a degree of confidence and security in their position within the organisation. This makes it more challenging for those on short-term, zero hours and freelance contracts.

Workplace bullying backstage

Participants raised concerns about instances of workplace bullying during focus group discussions. These instances typically involved 'banter' from more senior workers about subordinates and their ability to do the job, often by men about women. This indicates that the workplace culture backstage may be overly hierarchical and gendered, contributing to gender-based discrimination. Given that freelance workers are more likely to be female, such

gendered cultures may further inhibit workers from entering into dialogue about resolving work-life balance issues with their managers. A full account of gender affects are given in the following section.

Negative role models

Managers are known to play an important part in organisational cultures, in particular in role modelling work-life balance and breaking the long-hours culture¹¹. Anecdotal evidence from focus group participants revealed the influence of 'negative role models' on individuals looking to progress in their career or when planning family, as well as work-life balance concerns. Participants working on part-time and show contracts cited the long hours, lack of control over personal time experienced by full-time colleagues as a major factor discouraging them from moving into full-time work. Another example given is reports of colleagues missing the birth of a child or being shown no compassion or flexibility whilst heavily pregnant. These instances appear to set precedents within the culture that remain unchallenged, and are accepted as the status quo.

Work-life balance summary

Survey results revealed that working cultures backstage present challenges for positive interaction and dialogue between employees and managers. The findings suggest that dialogue and negotiation between employees and managers about work-life balance and flexible working issues is not commonplace and largely ineffective. Focus group findings in the previous section indicated that freelance workers choose to remain so because they want to avoid the long and unpredictable hours that would be expected in a full-time, permanent role. However, working cultures that are not welcoming of work-life balance discussions, combined with the presence of negative role models, may further inhibit freelancers and women from feeling that they can achieve a good work-life balance in backstage roles, creating a self-perpetuating cycle.

The gendered impact of backstage working practices

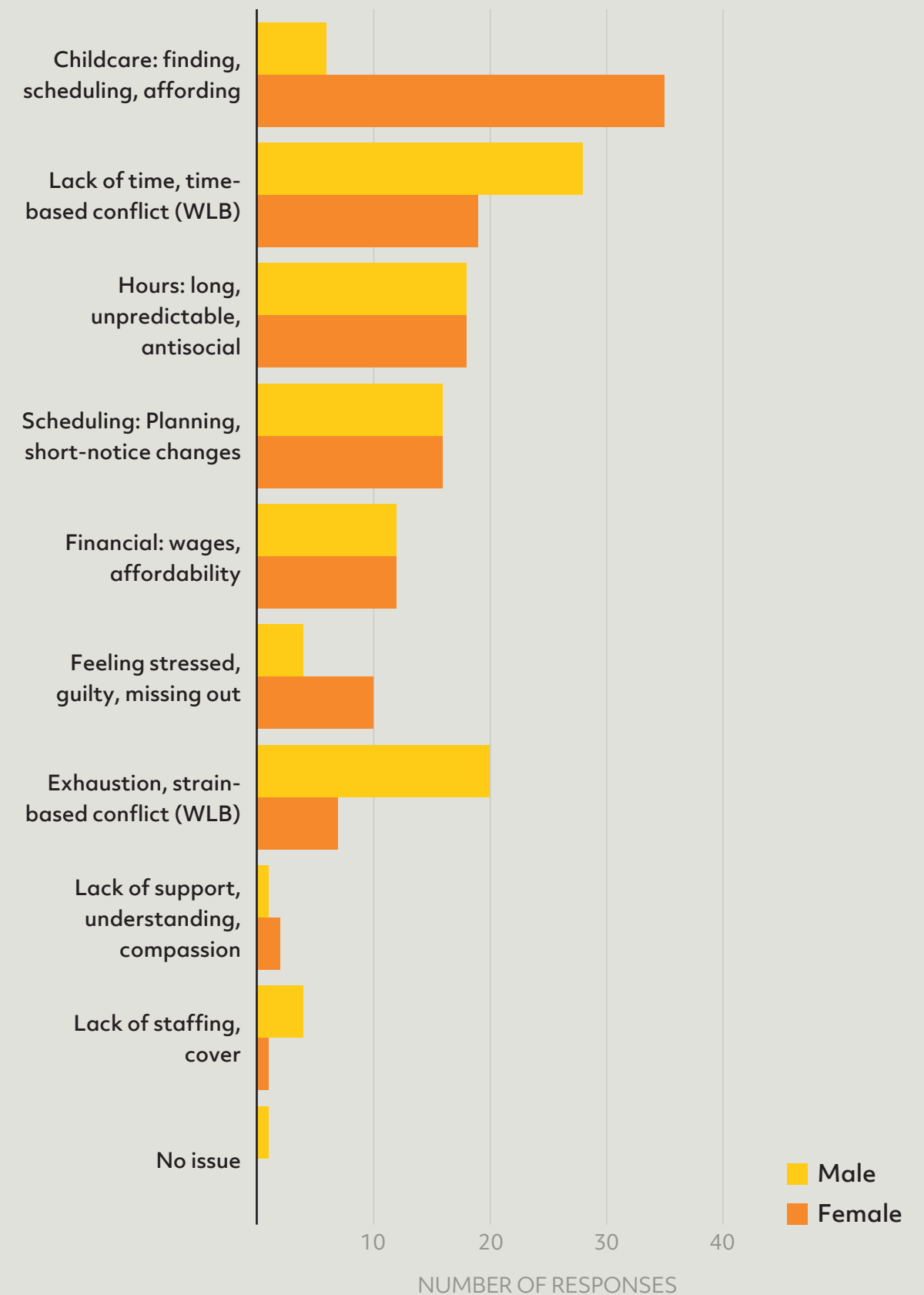
The data suggests that the working lives and careers of both male and female parents and carers are significantly, but differently, impacted; female parents and carers experience career compromises while male parents and carers more commonly report temporal issues around work-life balance. In this sample, men were 22% more likely to be parents and carers than women, however it is female backstage workers whose caring responsibilities appear to disproportionately impact their working lives.

Male and female parents and carers experience a different pattern of challenges (**Figure 20**).

Male backstage workers most frequently reported a lack of time and feeling exhausted due to time-based work-life balance conflict. Reported challenges of long, unpredictable hours and scheduling issues were equal between genders.

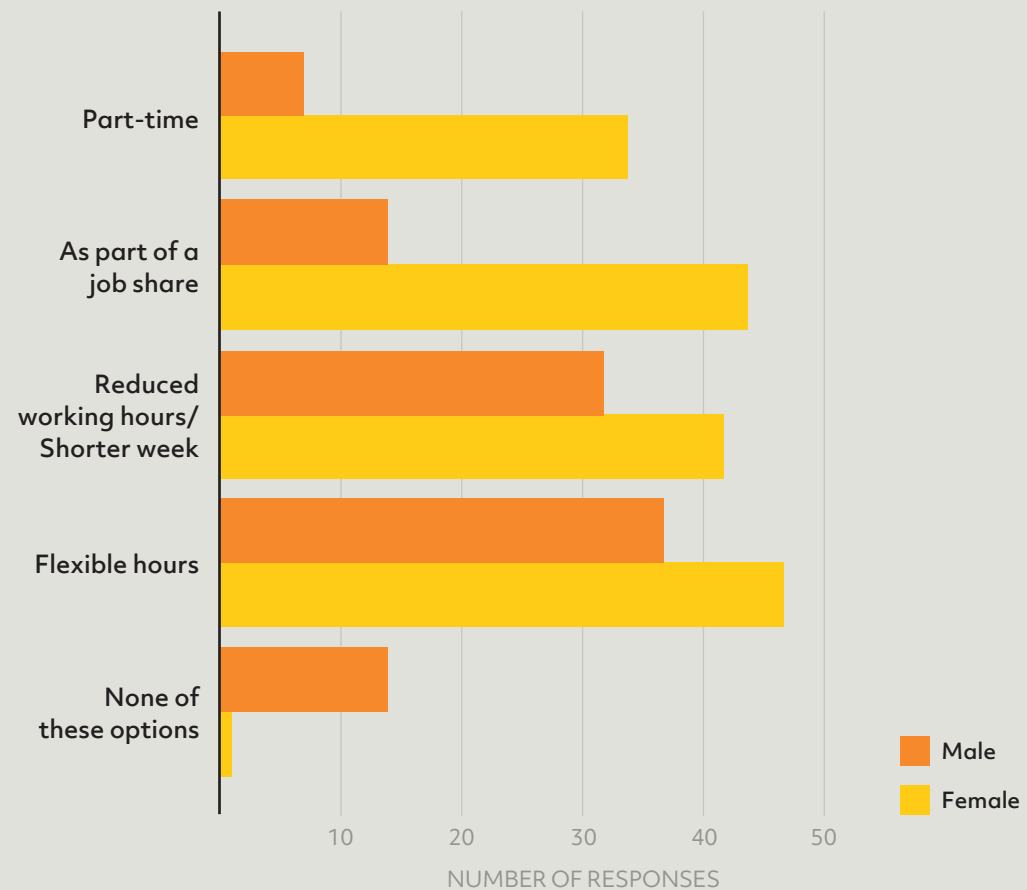
Childcare was reported to be the fourth biggest challenge for the sample overall and the second biggest for parents and carers in general (**Figure 6, page 15**) but it was found to be the biggest challenge for women by a large margin (**Figure 20**).

Figure 20. Biggest challenges of backstage work for parents and carers by gender (n=127)*



* 61 females and 66 males.

Figure 21. Flexible working options considered by gender (n=125)



The gendered challenges for women in the backstage workforce

More than half of the mothers in this survey identified childcare as their major challenge. This reflects data in the PiPA Balancing Act survey where 79% of females in the performing arts identified as the primary carer, thus having primary concern in the family for childcare¹. There is also an association between gender and employment type in this study; women are significantly more likely to be on freelance contracts than men, with female parents and carers most likely to be freelancers or on short term and show contracts (Figure 2, page 12). This reflects data from the wider theatre sector where women with parent and caring responsibilities were found to be more likely to be working part-time or freelance than women without, while there was no such difference between male parents and carers and non-carers¹.

Working part-time, freelance or on short-term contracts can provide necessary flexibility or a cap on hours required in order to manage caring responsibilities and work commitments. However, freelance and short-term contracts provide less access to supportive working structures, such as flexible working, job shares, carers leave, sufficient maternity benefit or shared parental leave. They may also lack job security, career development opportunities and the support required to sustain a long term career.

Further gendered impacts of backstage working conditions include the fact that 64% of females reported having to change jobs due to caring responsibilities, while this was true for only 24% of males, despite the relatively even split of males and females reporting to be parents and carers in this survey.

Overall, 92% of respondents reported that they would consider various forms of flexible working if it was available. Women more frequently reported that they would like all forms of flexible working options that would support their work-life commitments, while men more frequently reported wanting none of these options (Figure 21).

When asked which flexible working options they would consider during busy production periods, very few males reported considering part-time work or a job share. Interestingly however, similar numbers of males as females said they wanted a shorter working week and more flexible hours. When asked what support they would have liked during busy production periods, male parents and carers more frequently cited improvements to working practices such as better planning and scheduling, management of overtime, pay and staffing.

Focus group discussions substantiated the inherent gender differences. When asked about job shares and flexible working, men reported not wanting these solutions, often because they did not want to take a cut in salary. Women, both in work and not working, reported wanting the flexibility that would allow them to work whilst maintaining responsibilities outside of work. In particular, job shares were seen as a valuable tool for increasing the chances for freelancers to return to work and remain in employment over time.

New trends in fatherhood

If we conclude that the demands of full-time backstage work is a significant barrier for female workers with caring responsibilities, it is important to investigate the impact of full-time employment for fathers.

Cultural and societal norms still mean that it is more typical for the father to be the primary earner, while mothers remain more likely to be the default primary carer. However younger generations are challenging these ideas. The 2019 Working Families Modern Families Index¹³ shows fathers are increasingly choosing not to work extremely long hours and are taking a more active part in family life, whilst an increasing proportion of mothers in dual-earner couples are working full time and being the primary earner¹³. 70% of fathers said they 'would carefully consider childcare arrangements before taking a new job or promotion', 15% reported that they had reduced their hours, 11% had found a new job which better suited their family life and 10% had turned down a new job. This suggests that fathers are increasingly making the same considerations, choices and compromises as women when it comes to work-family balance.

However, data from the present Backstage Workers Report suggests that working culture backstage may not yet support this trend:

"I had to move into education, mainly so I could see my son grow up. I spent the first four years of life not being able to be a dad. To the point where he didn't really know who I was."

The 2019 Working Families Modern Families Index also identified that employers have a role to play, not just in policy creation but in establishing organisational cultures that are

favourable towards flexibility and work-life balance, changes that may particularly benefit fathers¹³. In the report, more fathers than mothers suggested that employers should 'let senior managers work flexibly to set a good example' and 'make efforts to change the company culture so work-life balance is more acceptable' (Ibid. p.22)

Other barriers are legislative. Whilst freelance female workers are entitled to maternity allowance (subject to eligibility) there is no such provision for freelance men. Their options are to either take time off work and lose income, or apply for unemployment benefits if they want to take time off to look after dependents. Shared Parental Leave (SPL) is not available in the UK for freelance workers, meaning that if either mother, father or same-sex partners are self-employed, they are not eligible for SPL. The PiPA Balancing Act report identified a strong appetite for SPL, with slightly more males (74%) than females (72%) stating that they would like to access it.

Conclusion

It is important for the performing arts sector to acknowledge the changing role of fathers in family life or run the risk of creating a 'fatherhood penalty,' similar to the 'motherhood penalty'¹⁶. The working practices, cultures and needs of backstage workers presented above builds on what is already understood about the precariousness and challenges of work in the performing arts more generally^{2,3}. It indicates that parents and carers, both men and women, may be disproportionately affected in different ways, requiring a multifaceted approach to finding solutions.

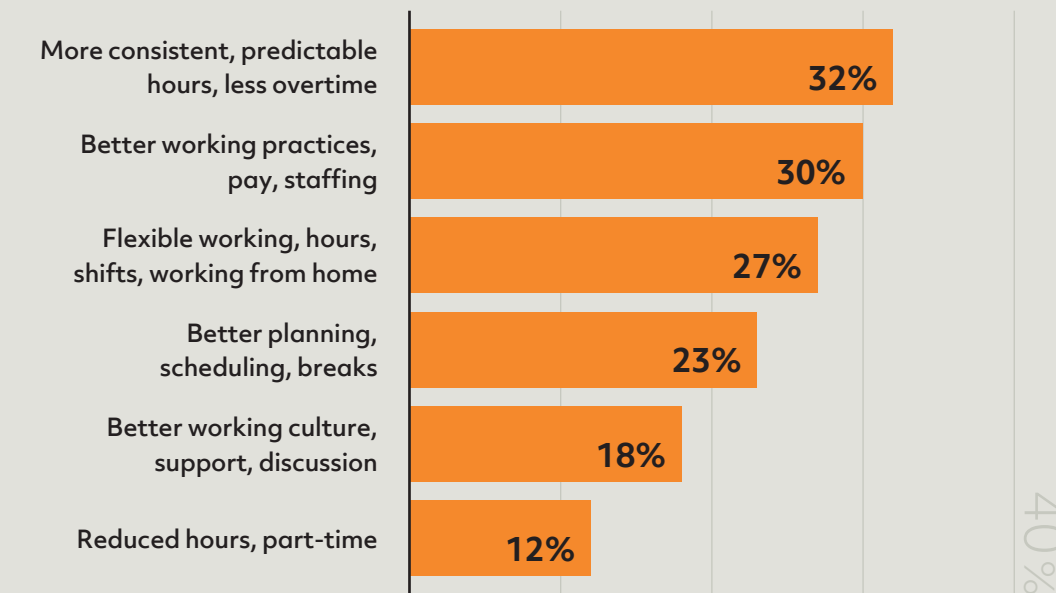
The trend which emerges is that women who are parents and carers report childcare as the major challenge and are more likely to transition to freelance contracts. Fathers, even though they report a lack of time and working unmanageable hours, remain in full-time work. Female backstage workers therefore make career compromises or downshift their careers in a way that male colleagues do not. This suggests the way backstage work is organised, and the expectations around hours and workloads, contributes to the choices made by women and by men.

In summary, working conditions backstage have different, but equally challenging impacts on men and women.

For female parents and carers, primary caring responsibilities appear to influence greater take-up of freelance employment contracts, which in turn affects their working lives and career progression. It is unclear whether female backstage workers choose to be the primary carer and therefore also choose to move away from full-time work, or whether the inflexible and demanding nature of backstage work makes the choice to become the primary carer seem the only way to combine work and family. The indications from wider studies suggests the former; that women and men are increasingly looking for equality at home, rather than the woman automatically taking on primary care roles but, that in many industries, including the performing arts, the nature and structure of work constrain how those choices are made.

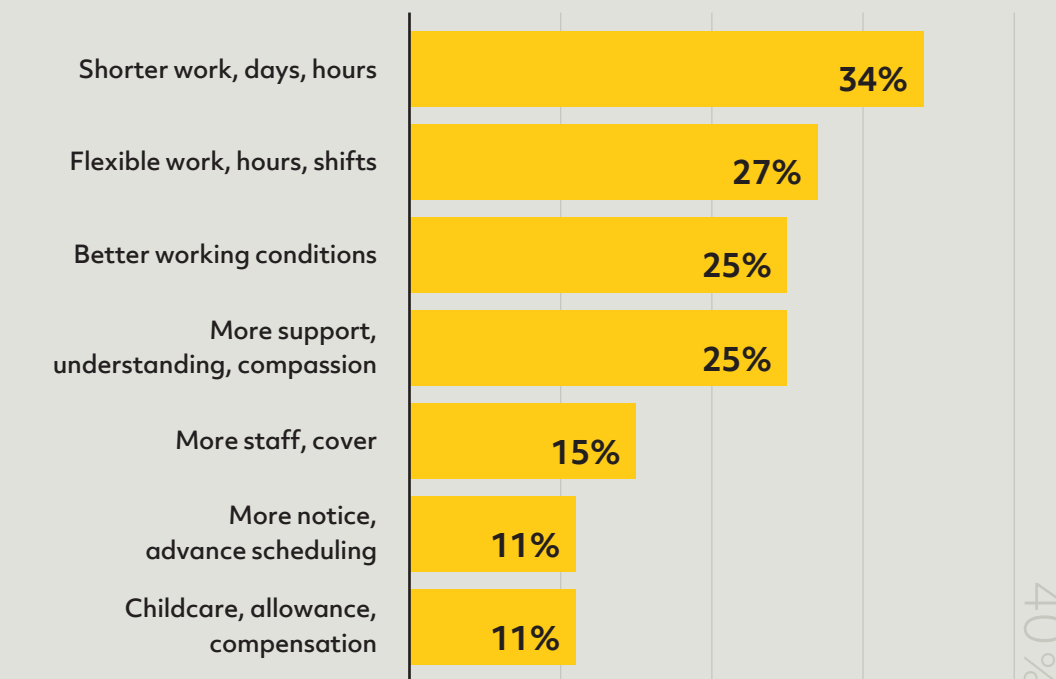
In spite of the long hours and scheduling issues experienced in backstage work, it is likely that male parents and carers are seeking to take a more active role in family commitments, and we see that fathers are beginning to report time challenges around their work, indicating work-family conflict is becoming an issue for them. This becomes a key risk for employers already struggling to attract and retain full-time female employees.

Figure 22. What do you think could help you to improve your work-life balance? (n=273)*



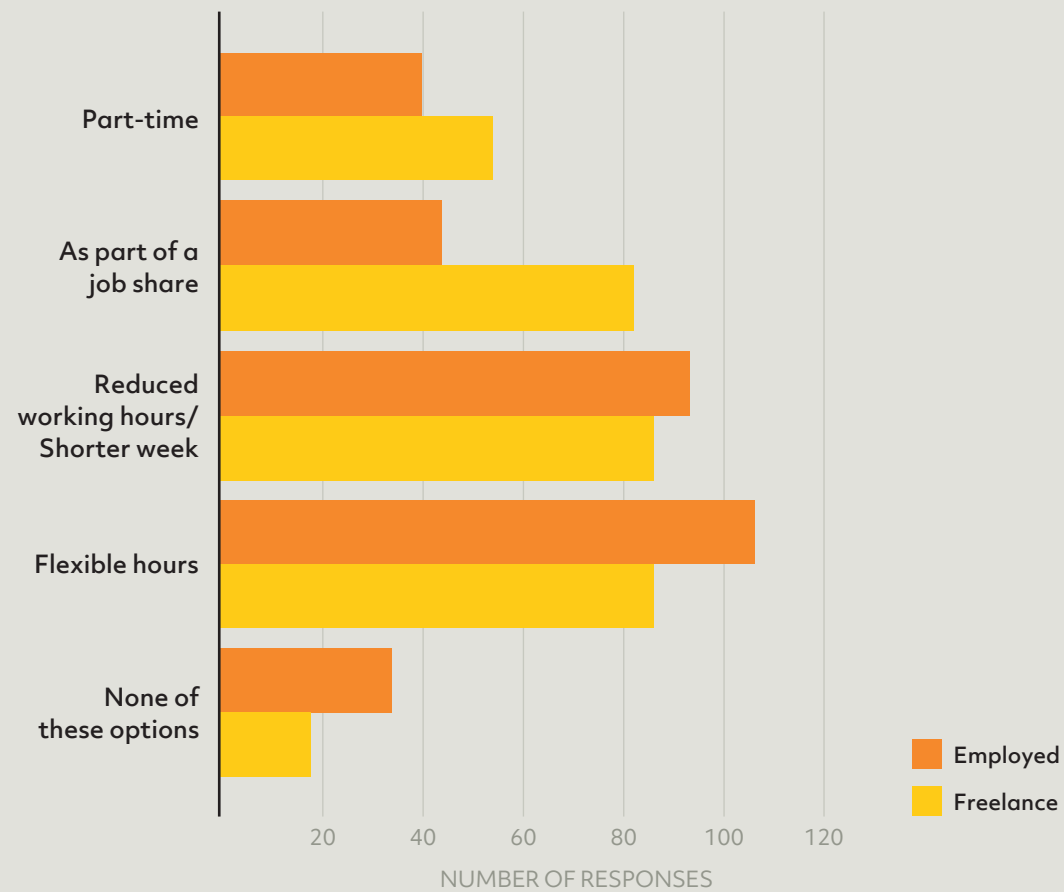
* Whole sample. % sum to >100% as more than one code permissible for each response.

Figure 23. Forms of support desired by parents and carers during busy production periods (n=93)



* % sum to >100% as more than one code permissible for each response.

Figure 24. Flexible working options considered by employment type (n=316)



We conclude that working patterns and demands are difficult to reconcile with being an active parent or carer. We also note the trend for men wishing to be more active fathers but also, in some cases, making the kinds of career compromises that women make. The implication for the industry is that changes in how work is organised, and how staff are supported, could make it possible for more women to maintain their professional lives alongside family responsibilities, and could reduce the risk of losing male skills and talents as well as female.

What do backstage workers say would help?

The whole sample was asked “What do you think could help you improve your work-life balance?” (Figure 22, page 35).

Irrespective of caring responsibilities, workers reported that more consistent, predictable hours with less requirement for overtime, better working practices, improved pay and staffing levels, and flexible working options would improve their work-life balance.

Specifically, the survey aimed to explore strategies and solutions sought by parents and carers backstage, who described the kinds of support they would want during busy production periods (Figure 23, page 35).

34% of parents and carers reported that shorter working days, shift work or flexible working (including flexible start and finish times) during these periods would better enable them to manage childcare responsibilities. 27% talked about flexible working options, while 25% mentioned better working conditions; better pay, more training and development or better planning and scheduling, and a desire for more support and understanding to improve work-life balance.

Figure 23 (page 35) detailed how flexible working preferences differed by gender. Another pattern was observed by employment type (Figure 24).

Those employed on full or part-time contracts most frequently considered a reduced working week and flexible hours, while those on freelance type contracts more frequently reported considering part-time or job-share options. Job-shares and part-time work were more popular with freelancers, who are more likely to be females, which may indicate a desire for a more formal employment contract, potentially offering manageable hours and security in order to achieve better work-life balance and accommodate childcare responsibilities. Those already employed, and therefore more likely to be male, are also more likely to desire more flexibility or a reduction in hours to help improve their work-life balance.

Summary

Focus groups identified a strong level of engagement in backstage workers, who are extremely dedicated and passionate about their work and are prepared to work long, intense hours to make a performance happen:

“Whilst I’m young with no kids or family to look after I’m happy to work all the hours I can. I love my work and all the people and am committed to making sure I do the best job I can but I don’t see how I could carry on doing these crazy hours with a family.”

At the same time, the data suggests that backstage workers have a strong desire for more flexibility and control over working patterns that would enable them to cope more effectively with often intense work periods, antisocial hours and a pressurised environment. This indicates that workers are giving considerable commitment, time and energy to their work, which may not yet be supported by the resources of a strong infrastructure and management in order to provide good levels of flexibility and autonomy.

3. Conclusions, implications and recommendations

The PiPA Backstage Workers Survey has uncovered risks for the workforce with clear implications for employers. The risks are both physical and psychosocial. High job demands, including long hours and unclear expectations around scheduling, are common and both insufficiently managed and acknowledged. Common working practices make it hard for workers to have a good work-life balance. For carers and parents in particular, the data indicates that, unlike many other sectors, it is logistically extremely challenging to be a primary carer and have a full-time contract in the backstage sector. Limited flexibility, low support and little to no control or autonomy over ways of working indicates that workers are at risk of stress, in particular when juggling job demands with responsibilities outside of the workplace. Given that backstage work will always have some challenging aspects, such as intense work periods and out of hours working, creative solutions are needed. The hours and unpredictability translate into a working environment that is demanding for all workers, carers and non-carers alike. Diversity and work culture issues need to be attended to as a matter of urgency, as men and women are each affected in different ways.

Recommendation 1: Monitor work demands

Increased backstage workforce monitoring would help to better understand current work demands and risks. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published stress management standards as a guide for best practice (HSE, 2016). **Table 1** summarises these factors, alongside the challenges reported by backstage workers in this survey, to highlight the potential risk for employers. Risk and safety audits using established frameworks such as the HSE standards, are an important first step to inform activities to implement better and safer working practices.

Recommendation 2: Improve channels of communication

Improved lines of communication between management, leadership and backstage workers would encourage dialogue and transparency about the challenges experienced by the workforce. This could potentially lead to increased staff retention and enhanced performance. Appraisals and check-in points, both formal and informal, provide an opportunity for workers to raise concerns about work-life balance with increased confidence. This is particularly pertinent for freelance and casual workers, whose precarious working patterns may further inhibit their confidence to raise concerns. The focus group data suggests there may be instances of unacceptable behaviours backstage and a culture where bullying is tolerated, particularly from male managers to female workers. This can be addressed through fostering an environment of open communication, as a priority, to embed understanding for diversity.

Conducting staff surveys and focus groups with workers and management as part of the PiPA Best Practice Charter is recommended in order to investigate and identify the specific challenges, and opportunities. Focus on particularly vulnerable groups – women and those with caring responsibilities who work freelance – is recommended. It is important to collect data on attrition so that employers are more aware of what the issues and priorities are.

Table 1. HSE risk factors and challenges for backstage workers adapted from HSE (2016).¹⁸

Job characteristics linked to work stress (HSE, 2016)		PiPA backstage workers survey	Potential occupational risk for employees
Demands	Workload, work patterns and work environment	Excessive overtime (68%), missed meal breaks (92%). 33% reported long, unpredictable, antisocial hours as biggest challenge.	High Immediate
Control	Influence and autonomy over ways of working	Changes of call times (85%), involuntary overtime (68%). 28% reported poor scheduling, short notice changes as biggest challenge.	High Immediate
Support	Resources, sponsorship and encouragement	Low experience of flexible working (34%). Low support for parents/carers (29%) and low flexibility (14%) during busy production periods. Very few WLB concerns resolved successfully (9%).	High Immediate
Relationships	Positive behaviours, avoiding conflict	Evidence of bullying, gendered culture.	High Immediate
Change	Change management and communication	N/A – data not collected	N/A
Role	Understanding of role in the organisation	N/A – data not collected	N/A
Work-life balance	Ability to balance demands of work and home life	48% raised concerns about work-life balance. 33% reported work-life balance as biggest challenge.	Moderate Mid-long term
Career development	Chance for promotion, development, progression	42% of parents/carers changed jobs due to caring responsibilities; 64% for women.	Moderate Mid-long term

Recommendation 3: Focus on positive role modelling

This report has identified the influence of negative role modelling in backstage work. Witnessing poor treatment and lack of understanding for the needs of colleagues, as well as observing extreme working conditions, present significant deterrents for part-time, casual and freelance workers considering full-time backstage employment opportunities. A focus on positive role modelling and visibly promoting, practising and celebrating work-life balance, could potentially encourage workers, especially those with caring responsibilities or those planning for a future family, to pursue a long term career in backstage work. Celebrating positive male as well as female role models, for meeting work and family commitments and encouraging take up of shared parental leave will potentially promote a more family friendly working environment, addressing the risks of both the fatherhood and motherhood penalties.

Recommendation 4: Improve work scheduling and flexibility

We found low evidence of support for flexible working options being available, and workers lack clear expectations around the most fundamental aspects of work: the required working times and hours.

Last minute changes reduce autonomy and control over individuals' ability to achieve a good work-life balance and risk impacting employee engagement. Links between employee engagement and long-term talent development and retention suggest that employers should review the resources and work structures for backstage workers to ensure that every show is supported by a highly experienced, engaged backstage team. The challenging conditions experienced by backstage workers are a combination of high expectations, in terms of hours worked and the need to cope with last minute changes, paired with a relative lack of support structures in place to accommodate supportive and flexible ways of working. This holds the risk that eventually people may leave to find employment outside of the sector, meaning that the industry loses experienced, committed talent and a wealth of knowledge and skills. Improvements to organisational cultures and working practices also stand to benefit fathers, who are likely to work long hours to the detriment of family life, as work-life balance is not a valued part of the culture backstage.

We identify the following priorities for action:

- a) More advance scheduling for all aspects of work
- b) Better coordination of resources during production and technical weeks to clarify expectations and scheduling
- c) More use of formal and informal flexible work options
- d) Proactive awareness-raising and promotion of Shared Parental Leave for male workers.

"I found that working in the theatre was not conducive to having a family"

Anonymous survey respondent



4. Appendix A: Research design and methodology

The web-based survey was developed by the PiPA team and included a mix of fixed-choice response format questions, and free-fill (open-ended) questions. Participants were asked about their caring responsibilities, the challenges they experience juggling work and life demands, and about their work backstage. The survey aimed to tap into work-life balance issues by looking at the impact of working lives on life outside work and vice versa, including issues that are difficult to negotiate, for example asking managers about flexible working options.

The survey was publicised via BECTU and PiPA partners between April 2019 and May 2019 to target UK backstage workers. While this was a 'snowball' sample, and therefore cannot be said to be representative of all backstage roles, these recruitment channels resulted in a very even gender balance in the sample, increasing the proportion of males, and those in full-time employment, as compared to previous PiPA research studies. The survey was supplemented with three focus groups to gather in-depth perceptions. The final survey had 338 responses, of which 171 (51%) were female and 137 (41%) had parenting or caring responsibilities.

Analysis was conducted by generating descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, percentages) to explore patterns and trends within the data. Some inferential statistical tests were carried, for example, to compare associations between variables such as gender and contract type). Responses to the open-ended questions were analysed using 'thematic analysis', generating key themes from the responses, and illustrative quotes included in this report.

5. Appendix B: Backstage workers survey

About you

1. Please indicate your gender.
2. What is your job title?
3. What employment type do you predominantly work under?
4. What types of venues do you predominantly work for?
5. Are you a member of any of the following organisations?
6. Are you a parent, or care for an elderly, ill or disabled adult?

Caring responsibilities

7. Do you have any children under the age of 18?
8. Do you have any other caring responsibilities? If yes, please specify.
9. Have you had to change your job due to caring responsibilities? If yes, please specify.
10. Have your caring responsibilities impacted on you in any other way? If yes, please specify.
11. Has the organisation you worked for provided you with extra support for your caring responsibilities during busy production periods? If yes, what form did this take?
12. What support would you have liked during those production periods?

Working practices

13. Have you ever experienced flexible working in your department? If yes, please specify.
14. If it was available, would you consider working: As part of a job share; Flexible hours; Part time; Reduced working hours/shorter week; None of the above; Other?
15. Does your job include regular production weeks?
16. As part of your job, have you experienced: Change of call times with less than 12 hours; Change of call times with less than 6 hours; Involuntary overtime; Excessive overtime; Infringement of rest break / overnight break; Missed meal breaks?
17. Were you made to sign a working time opt-out agreement? What was your experience with it?
18. If yes, did you exercise your right to opt back in?
19. Have you ever raised your concerns regarding your work-life balance with your employer?
20. What are the three biggest challenges you face when trying to combine family responsibilities with your work commitments?
21. What do you think could help you to improve your work-life balance?

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"Outside of production periods, there have been times when work can be flexible. During production periods, this is almost never the case"

**Anonymous
survey respondent**

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