

ARTS INDUSTRY COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

*an independent
voice for the arts*

SA Arts Sector Financial Wellbeing, Mental Health & WHS Report 2024



SA ART SECTOR FINANCIAL WELLBEING, MENTAL HEALTH & WHS REPORT 2024

Acknowledgement of Country

The Arts Industry Council South Australia Inc (AICSA) acknowledges that we live, work and make art on Aboriginal Lands, including Karna Yarta.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands upon which we live and work, in what is now also called South Australia. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.

We pay our respect and deep thanks to Elders past, present and emerging, as well as to First Nations leaders in our arts sector.

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Executive Summary

Workplace Health and Safety is an element of the wellbeing artists and arts workers. To find out more about the current state of the sector, the Arts Industry Council of South Australia (AICSA) surveyed people working in the sector with the aim to support a better understanding about financial wellbeing and Work Health and Safety (WHS) issues facing artists, arts workers and arts organisations. This knowledge will help identify gaps in the current level of support for the sector, which will assist advocacy work and the development of better resources, materials and services for art and cultural workers.

AICSA undertook a survey of the sector in 2024.

- 137 respondents:
 - Average respondent is a 35–44-year-old female, not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
 - 57% indicated that they worked within more than one art form, however visual arts was most commonly represented (45%)
 - Of the primary occupations listed, arts administration roles represented 42% of respondents, and artists 31%.
 - Only 27% are full time permanent workers
 - 64% have worked in the sector for over a decade
- Lower than average wages:
 - 81% earn less than \$80k per annum
 - 39% earn less than \$40k per annum
 - 13% of artists don't earn any money or lose money from their arts practice
 - The length of time respondents have worked in the sector did not necessarily impact their income
 - 41% work in a role outside the sector to supplement their income
 - 62% believe that their income is not commensurate with hours worked
- Low rates of entitlements:
 - Only 78% of respondents reported that they received superannuation
- Support systems:
 - 67% are un-unionised, with 66% reporting they negotiated their own salary
 - 43% reported that a spouse/family member/partner has a salaried role which provides financial support
- Wellbeing:
 - 40% rated their financial wellbeing as precarious or very precarious
 - Commonly reported unrealistic time pressures and long work hours
 - Bullying and culturally unsafe practices are commonly experienced
 - Musicians were the most common profession to report witnessing or experiencing alcohol abuse

- Respondents expressed a high frequency of anxiety and depression indicators:
 - 46% described their mental health as 'Poor' or 'Fair'
 - 46% said they felt tired, sluggish or depressed 'Always' or 'Often'
 - 49% said they feel anxious or overwhelmed 'Always' or 'Often'
- Qualitative responses linked poor mental health to work precarity and pay.

The survey results show that artists and arts workers are overworked and underpaid, with a high proportion of poverty wages, precarity and lack of basic entitlements/protections such as superannuation. This is impacting on their life pathways and financial stability. Combined with a high frequency of exposure to bullying and culturally unsafe practices, the respondents of the survey reported poor mental health, with high indications of anxiety and depression.

Background

One of the Arts Industry Council SA's (AICSA) key goals is to proactively advocate for South Australia's arts and cultural sector. AICSA will continue to advance and embed the sector's role as a leading driver of the state's cultural identity and reputation, innovation and growth, as well as wellbeing and social cohesion.

This is achieved in a number of ways including:

- Monitoring and responding to issues affecting the arts in South Australia.
- Representing and speaking with one voice on behalf of our members and the broader sector.
- Developing evidence-led positioning, advocacy and audience development campaigns.
- Equipping and upskilling our members and the broader sector to strengthen our individual and collective advocacy.

Workplace Health and Safety and wellbeing, including financial wellbeing, amongst the arts and culture sector has been under a lot of scrutiny in relation to experiences of sexual harassment, bullying, difficult working conditions, poor remuneration in the sector. These working conditions have a strong impact on the wellbeing of artists and arts workers. *Revive*, the National Cultural Policy launched in 2023, has identified some of these areas as in need of redress and Arts South Australia has identified artists' workplace experience as an area of policy need.

Objective

This survey aims to gather more data about Work Health and Safety (WHS) issues facing artists, arts businesses and arts workers to identify gaps in the current level of support, which will assist advocacy work, the development of better support materials and set benchmarks for future sector research.

Methodology

With direction from lead researcher, Dr Samuel Whiting, Lecturer – Creative Industries, UniSA Creative, University of South Australia, a survey was devised to determine a snapshot of Financial Wellbeing, Mental Health, Alcohol Use and Cultural Safety measures. Financial Wellbeing measures were revised from questions in AICSA’s 2022 Wage/Salary Transparency Survey to ensure continuity of data. Mental wellbeing questions were extracted from the Federal Government’s [People At Work Survey](#), under the advice of SafeWorkSA.

The Google Form survey was distributed via the AICSA website, e-newsletters and social media, calling on the arts sector to complete it based on their experiences at work. Posts were also sponsored on social media and shared widely by our member network, maximising its reach.

The results were then collated and analysed by AICSA General Manager, Kim Roberts BA(Hons)Sociology, GradDipMgt.

Results

137 respondents completed the survey. The results are detailed below.

Demographic data

The average survey respondent is a 35–44-year-old female, not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent:

- 56% of respondents were aged between 35 and 54
- 95% of respondents were not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- 70% of respondents were female

As there were few respondents aged 18-24, it is recommended that AICSA host a workshop to capture data from this age group.

Fig 1. Age of Respondents

What is your age?

137 responses

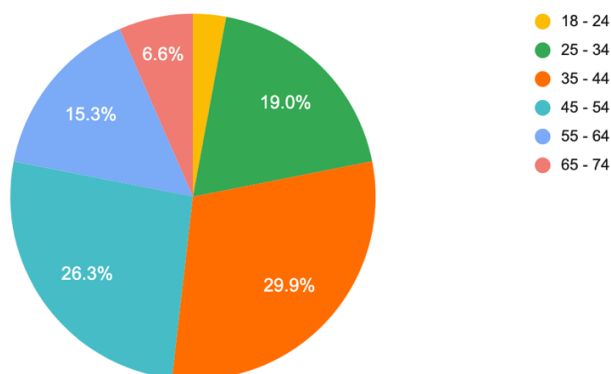


Fig 2. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Status

Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent?

137 responses

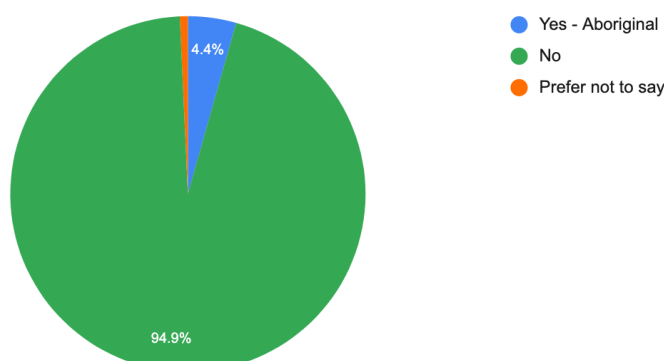
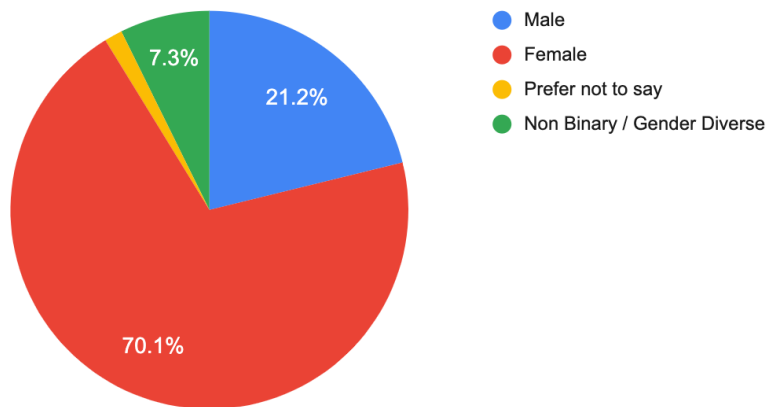


Fig 3. Gender identity of respondents

How do you identify?

137 responses

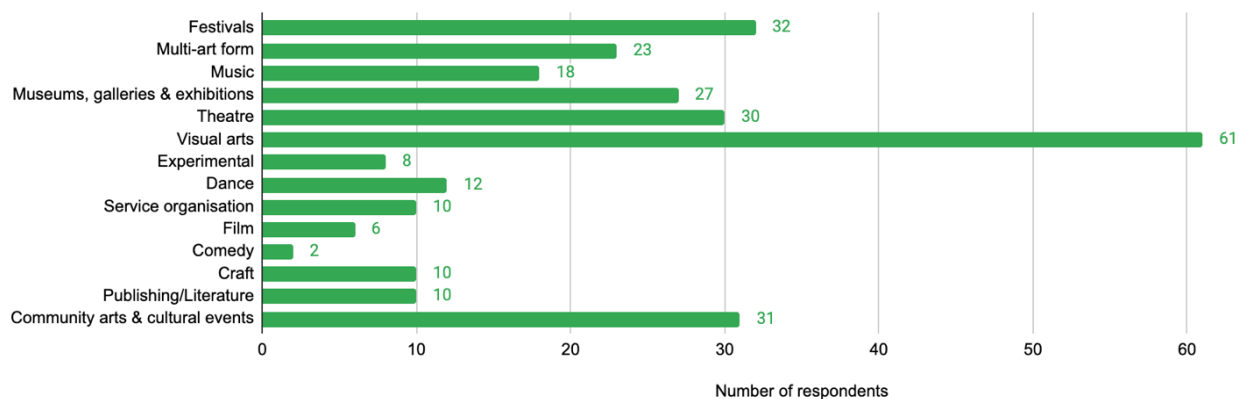


Occupations

Fig 4. Primary art form/industry of respondents.

What is the primary art form or industry in which you work (you may choose multiple)?

137 responses

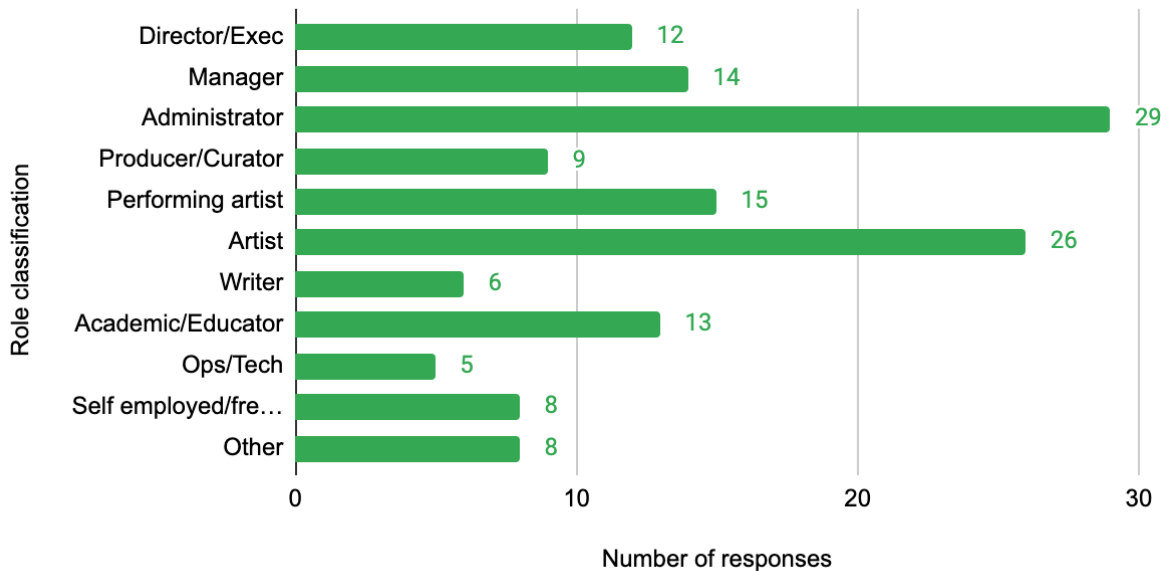


Respondents were from a wide variety of art forms, and many selected more than one category (57% of respondents). However, visual arts were represented more than others (45%).

Fig 5. Primary occupation grouped by category

What is your primary occupation?

131 responses



This question was open ended, leading to a wide variety of roles stated. Therefore, the responses were grouped. Grouping definitions were as follows:

- Director/Executive: CEO, GM, Director, Executive
- Manager: any job title including the word Manager, with exception of GM
- Administrator: any other arts administration-based role
- Producer/Curator: curator, programmer, creative producer, producer
- Performing Artist: musician, actor, dancer, performer
- Artist: artist, visual artist, sculptor, designer
- Writer: writer, writing
- Academic/Educator: school/vocational/tertiary educators, academics and informal tuition
- Operations/Tech: operations, lighting technician, technical production, VFX, VFX lighting
- Self employed/Freelance: small business owner, self employed, freelance
- Other: non-arts roles, including social work, retail, hospitality

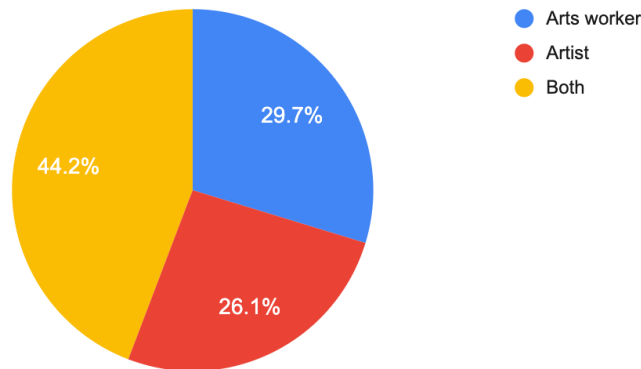
Administrative roles were heavily represented as respondent’s primary occupation, with arts administrators, managers and executives constituting 42% of respondents. Those who listed their primary occupation as artist or performing artist was 31%.

Therefore, the respondents reflect a wide variety of experiences of working in the SA arts sector.

Fig 6. Percentage of respondents working as artists and art workers

Are you an arts worker, artist, or both?

137 responses

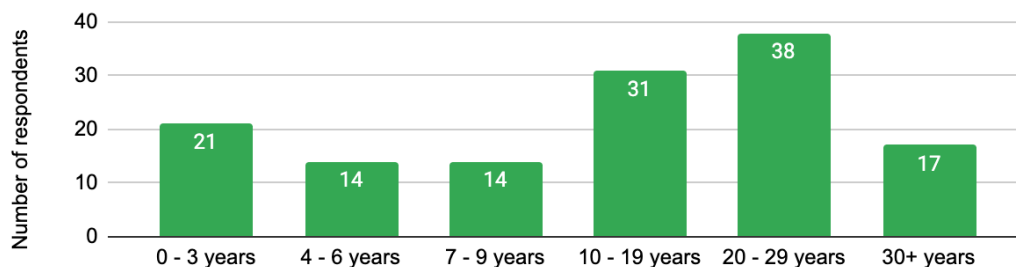


Only 29.7% of respondents were solely arts workers, and only 26.1% solely artists. 44.2% are both arts workers and artists, again demonstrating a cross-section of experiences in the sector.

Fig 7. Length of time working in the sector

Length of time respondents reported working in the sector

135 responses



63.7% survey respondents have worked in the sector for a decade or more, indicating the respondents are highly skilled and experienced artists and arts workers. There is a dip in those working in the sector between 4 and 9 years. This could potentially be due to professionals leaving the sector during COVID, as this was a well-documented phenomenon post-COVID.¹

Table 1. Years working in sector

What year did you begin working in the sector?	Year
Average	2008
Mode	2015
Earliest starting year	1970
Most recent starting year	2024

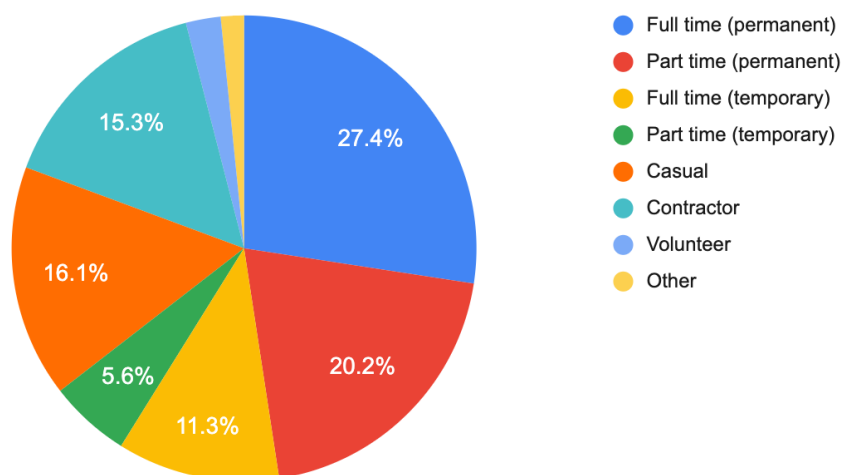
¹ <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/features/post-covid-or-post-burnout-less-is-necessary-2578519/>

Employment Status

Fig 8. Employment status

Select your employment status

136 responses

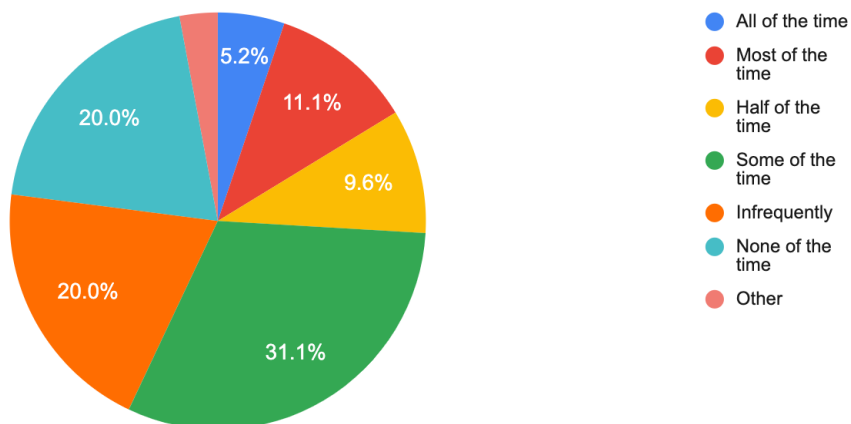


Only **27% of respondents were full time permanent workers**. When temporary contracts are included, 39% reported working full time. Part time, casual and contract work represented 57% of respondents, which is more than the wider population, with June 2024 ABS data showing part time share of employment is 31% Australia wide. This demonstrates that **artists and arts workers work less hours and face greater precarity of working conditions than the wider population**.

Fig 9. Employment status

In the last 4 weeks, approximately how frequently have you worked away from your primary work location (e.g. working from home or another location)?

136 responses

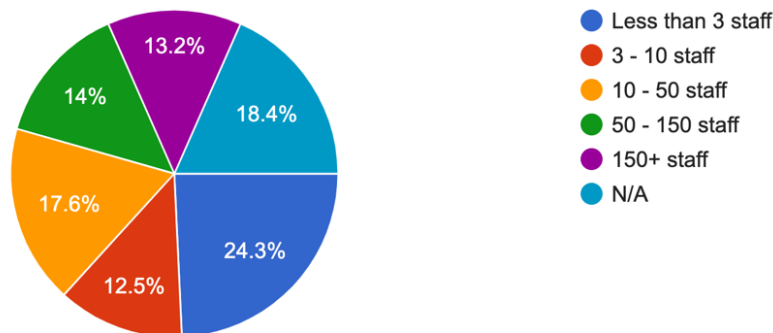


Only 20% did not work away from their primary work location, highlighting the transient and mobile nature of arts sector work.

Fig 10. Organisation size

What is the size of the organisation that you work in?

136 responses



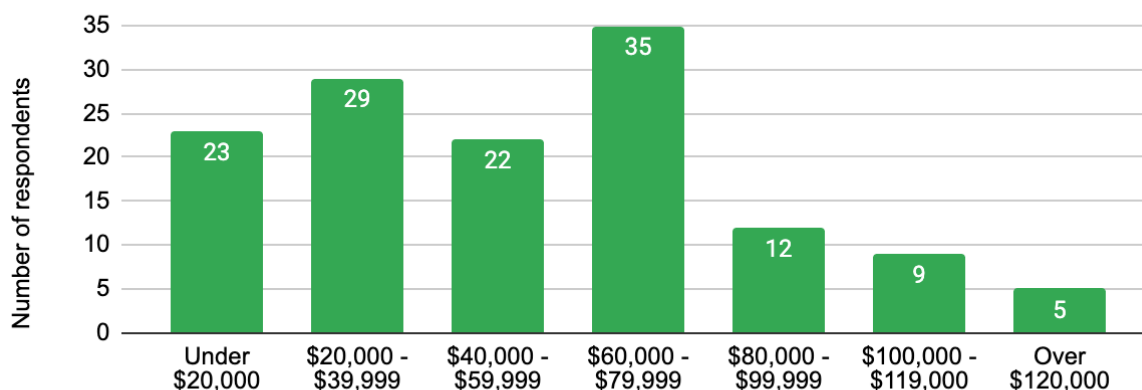
There was a wide spread of organisational sizes, however only 27% work at organisations of 50 or more staff, which suggests the majority of workers are in organisations without the infrastructure and support that comes with a large organisation, e.g. dedicated HR or Employee Assistance Programs.

Wages and benefits

Fig 11. Annual arts sector take-home salary/wage

What is your annual take-home pay*, including all arts sector work?

135 responses



Annual take-home pay from all arts sector work after part-time loading applied

81% earn below \$80k per annum, with 39% earning below \$40k per annum. This is concerning, especially as 47% state that they are working 0.7FTE or higher (Fig 16). This is much lower than the ABS' national average wage of \$101,670.40 (full time workers) and \$74,495.20 (all workers) over the same period.

Given the low wages reported, further analysis was needed. As expected, more senior roles attract higher income, with roles heavily reliant on gig work such as artists, performing artists, freelancers and writers attracting lower income as seen in Fig 12.

Fig 12. Annual take home pay by job category

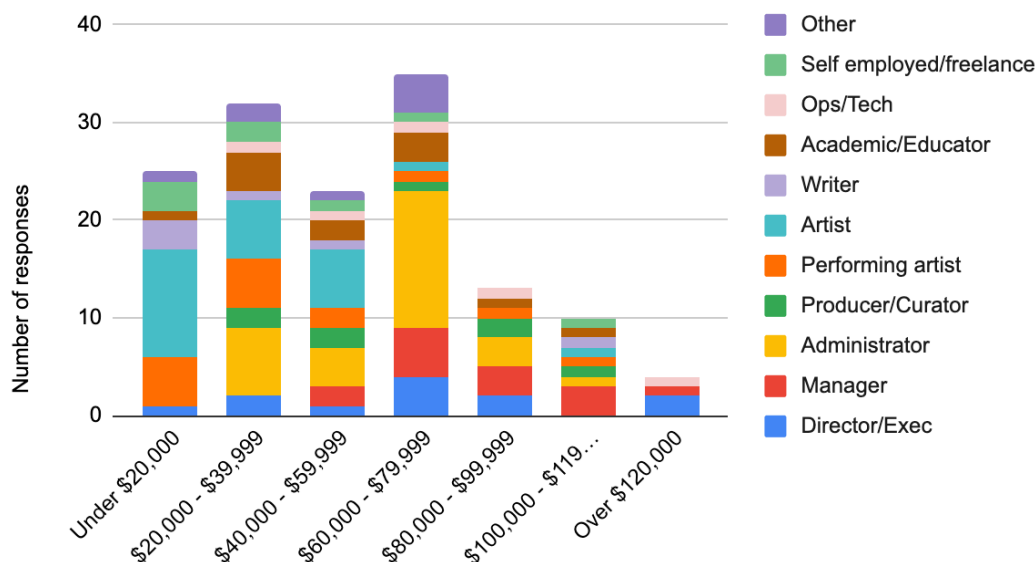
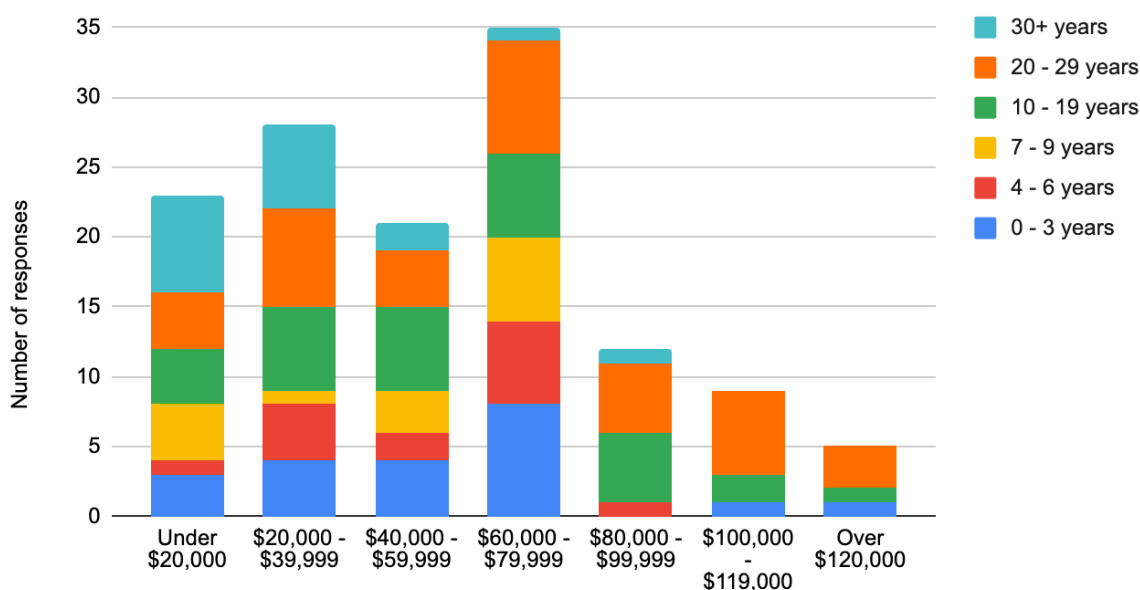


Fig 13. Annual take home pay by years in industry

Annual take-home pay by years in industry

135 responses

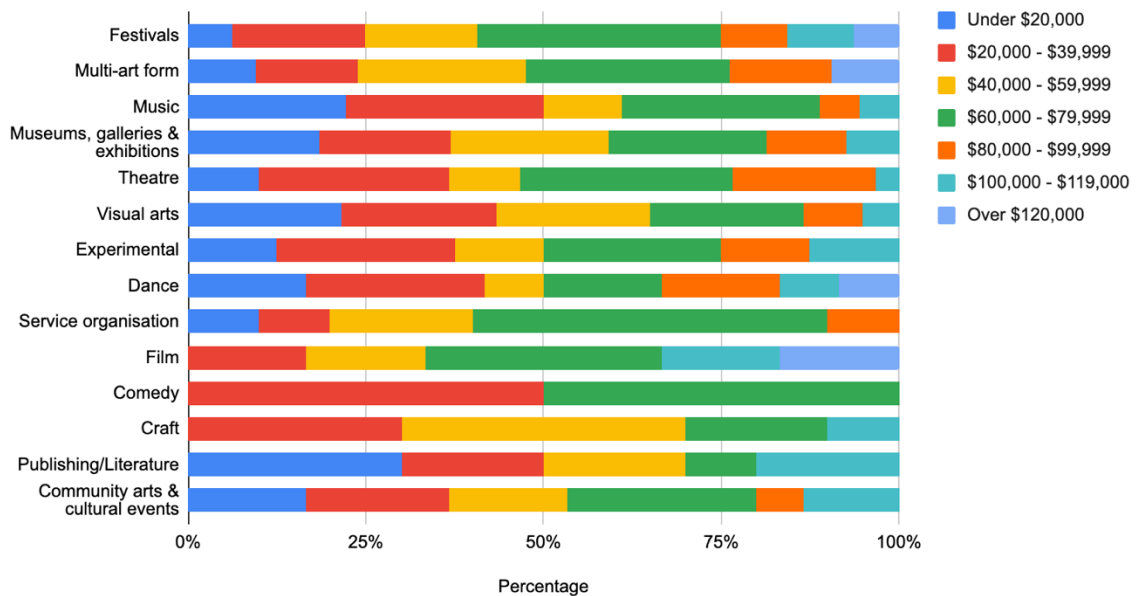


Shockingly, those with over 10 years' experience still represented a high proportion of those earning under \$60k p/a. This indicates that **length of time in the sector is not proportionate to higher income.**

Fig 14. Annual take home pay by sector (stacked)

Annual take home salary by sector

135 responses

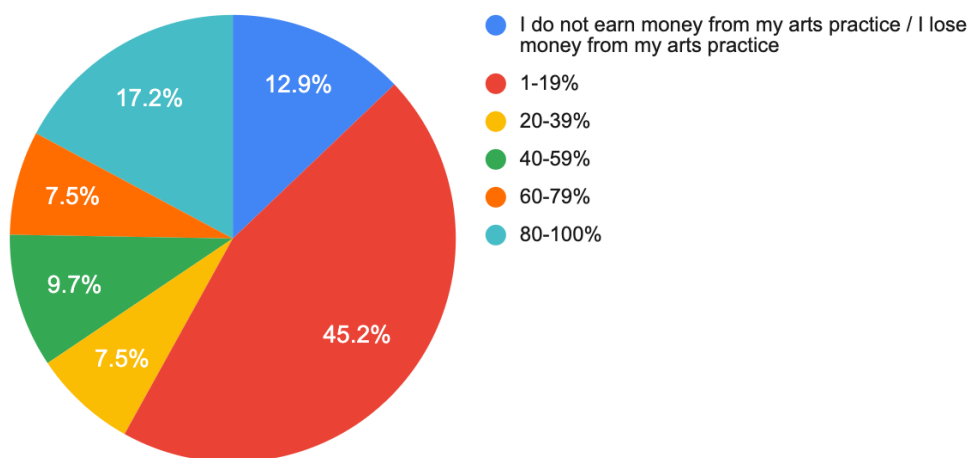


Breaking down income further, the Music, Visual Arts, Service Organisation and Museums, Galleries and Exhibitions sectors showed a high proportion of poverty wages (under \$20k p/a) combined with a low proportion of income above \$100k p/a.

Fig 15. Income generated from arts practice

If you are an artist and an arts worker, what percentage of your total income is derived from your arts practice?

93 valid responses



To investigate the emerging link between artists and low income, we next asked the percentage of income derived specifically from respondents' arts practice. Figure 15 was adjusted to reflect only those that stated they are an artist, or both an artist and arts

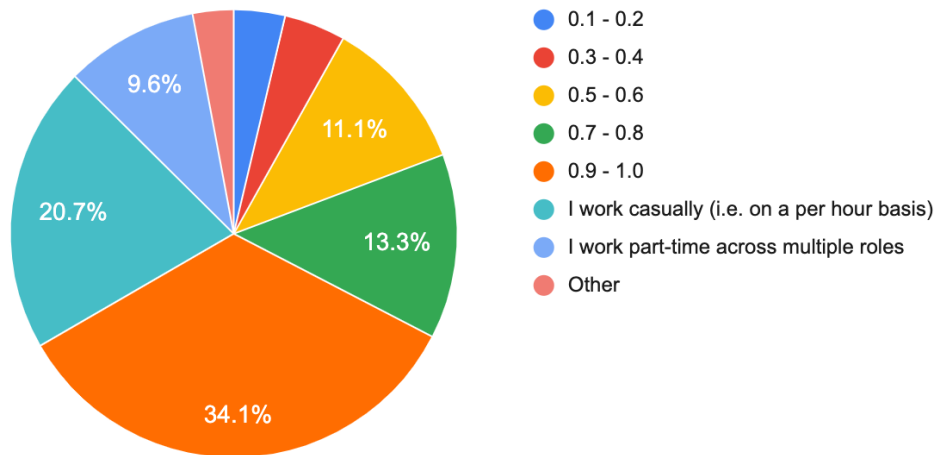
worker. **13% of respondents do not earn money from their arts practice or lose money from their arts practice**, while 45.2% state that their art practice contributes less than 20% to their income. Considering the average length of time respondents have been working in sector, this indicates **a high volume of unpaid but skilled labour** in respondents’ creative work.

Hours worked

Fig 16. Hours worked, expressed as FTE loading

What is the FTE of your primary role (whether salaried or freelance)?

135 responses

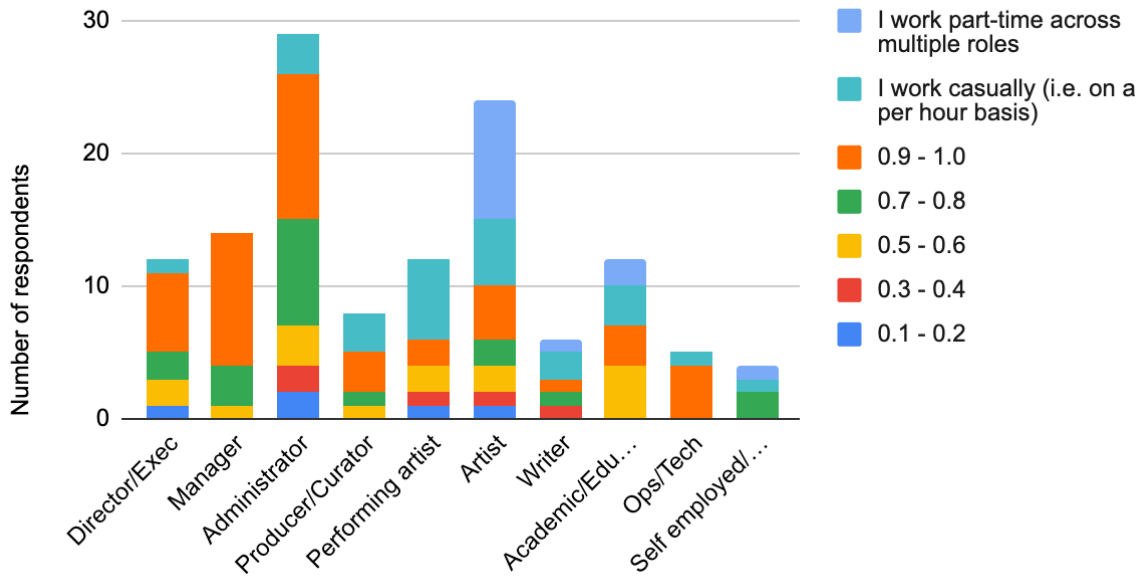


Highlighting the seriousness of the low income reported, **47% state that they are working 0.7FTE or higher**, while 20.7% work casually, and 9.6% reported working part time across several roles.

Fig 17. FTE loading by role category

FTE of primary role by role category

135 responses

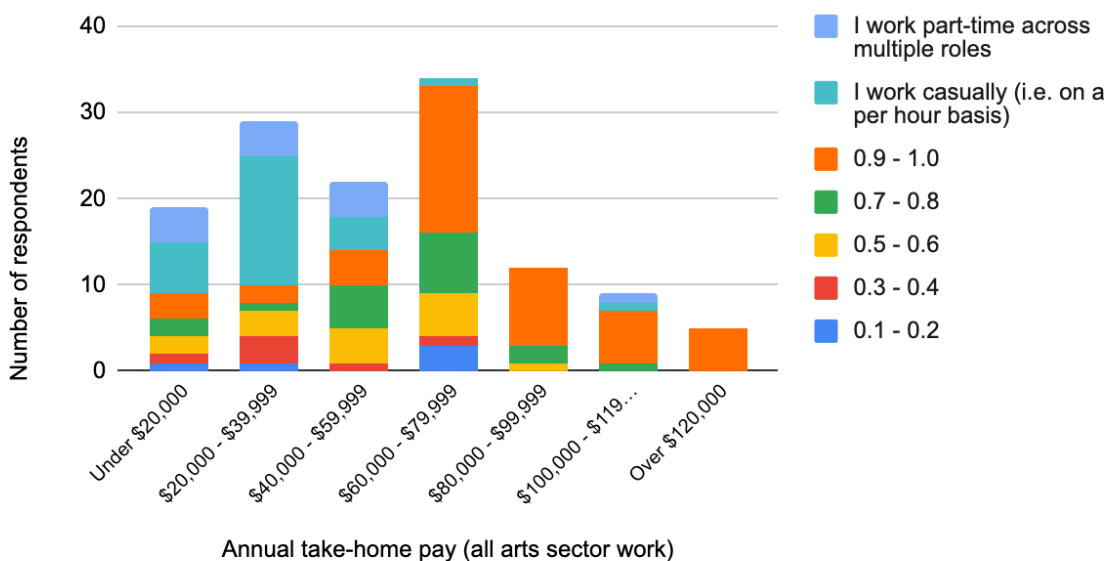


When cross-referenced with primary job roles, Directors/Executives, Managers and Administrators were more likely to report working full time, where Artists and Performing Artists were more likely to report casual work or spreading themselves across multiple part time roles, highlighting the seasonal and precarious nature of creative roles.

Fig 18. Salary range by FTE loading

Salary range by FTE loading

135 responses



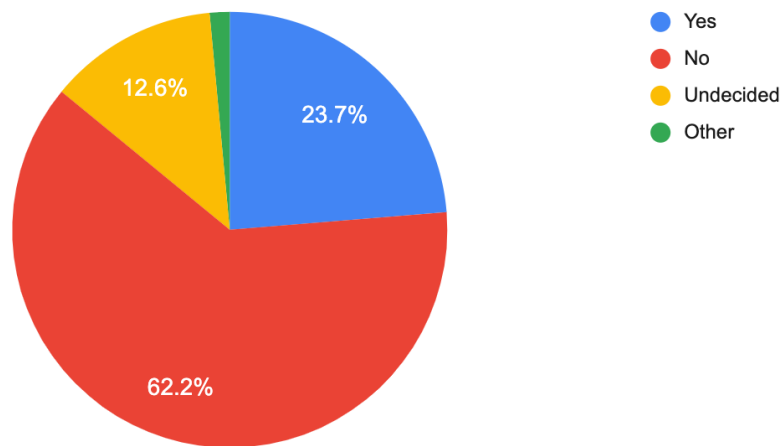
As anticipated, casual workers reported lower income, and full-time workers reported higher income. However, there is still a concerning number of workers reporting working full time, yet earning under \$60k p/a.

Understandably, **62% of responses indicated that their salary/wage is not commensurate with the hours that they work or their role.**

Fig 19. Income commensurate to hours worked and role(s)

Do you feel your income is fair, considering your hours worked and job role(s)?

136 responses



This sentiment was expanded on in the “Other” responses:

“I think my wage is good for the arts, but it is not competitive with my peers working outside of the arts”

Psychosocial Hazards: Workload

To provide more data surrounding hours worked and the impact on respondents' mental health, questions were asked about their perceptions of their workloads.

On a scale of 1 (Never) to 7 (Always), 60% gave a rating of 4 or above to the questions posed in Fig 20 and Fig 21, indicating a **high frequency of exposure to workload pressures**.

Fig 20. Pressure to work long hours

I am pressured to work long hours

133 responses

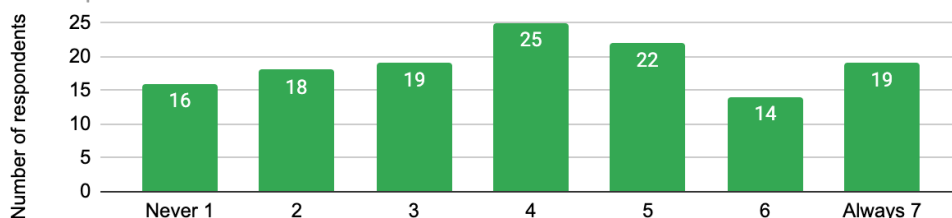
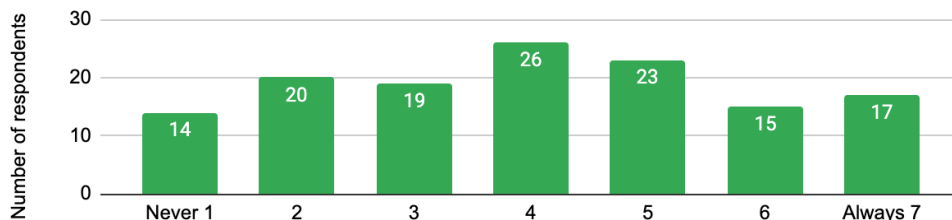


Fig 21. Unrealistic time pressure

I have unrealistic time pressures

134 responses



Wage negotiation & entitlements

Fig 22. Union membership

Are you currently a member of a trade union?

136 responses

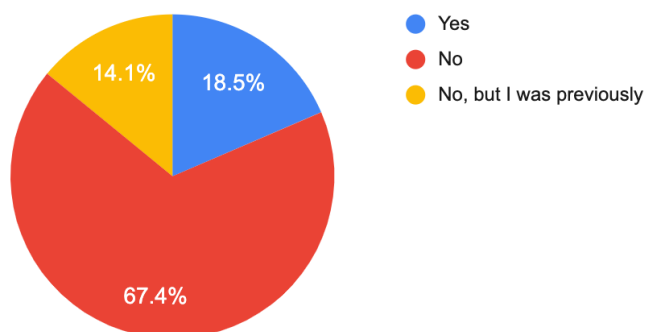
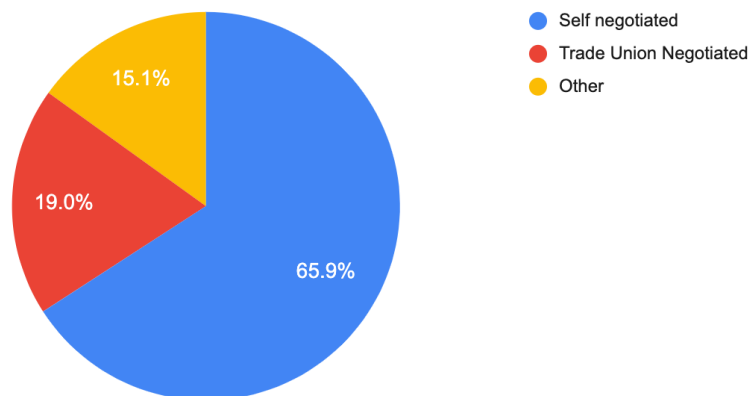


Fig 23. Salary/wage negotiation

Did you negotiate your own salary/wage, or did a trade union negotiate it on your behalf (i.e. via an enterprise agreement)?

126 responses



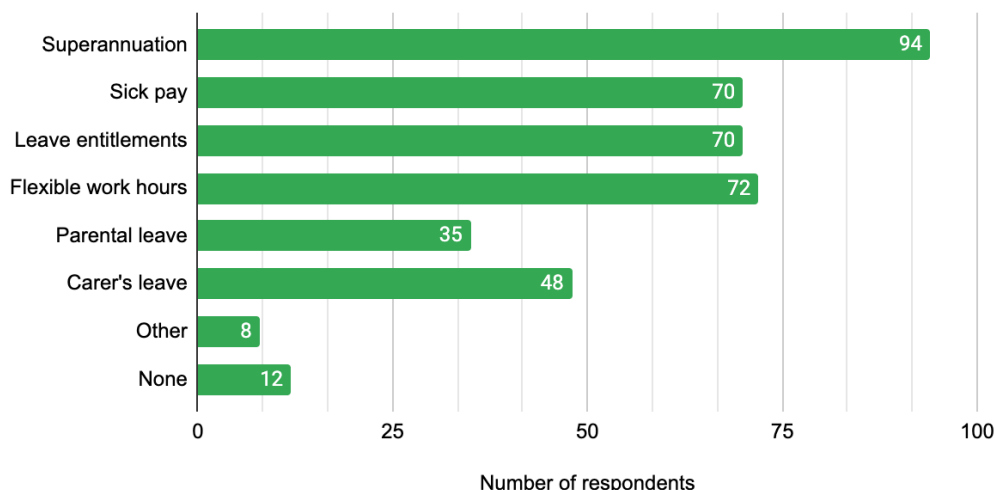
67% of respondents are not members of a union. As such, 66% of respondents report that they negotiated their own wages. Amongst the percentage of those answering “Other”, responses indicated that there was **no opportunity to negotiate**, that they were simply paid the Award or NAVA rate, that their work was unpaid, or that an Agent negotiated on their behalf:

- “[this question is] not applicable to artists who have no trade union or wages”
- “Not negotiable, just what is offered”
- “It is both - sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't, sometimes my agent does, sometimes I do, sometimes it is with an agreement, sometimes not.”

Fig 24. Benefits received

What benefits do you receive in addition to your salary?

121 responses



When asked what benefits they receive in addition to their salary/wage, a list of benefits were given, with an option for respondents to add their own entries. Manually entered responses were sorted into two categories:

- where someone listed a **benefit not on the list** such as equipment, professional development, Cultural Leave or vaccinations, this is shown in Fig 24 as **“Other”**
- and where respondents indicated their **lack of benefits** or high inconsistency in receiving any benefit, this is shown in Fig 24 as **“None”**. 5 respondents highlighted that they are responsible for pushing to receive their own superannuation, but are rarely successful:
 - *“Only one client accepts that they have responsibility to pay me super.”*
 - *...“casual job has super but no leave, casual cash job [has] no entitlements, sole trader work sometimes [has] super if organisations are able to pay it & no other entitlements”*

Only 94 out of 121 responses (**78%**) indicated that they **receive superannuation**, despite the existence of Australian Superannuation Guarantee. Other entitlements mandated in the National Employment Standards such as Sick Pay were only received by 58% or less respondents, despite only 21% of respondents stating that they worked on a casual basis.

These findings indicate a **concerning lack of basic and mandatory employee entitlements** across the sector.

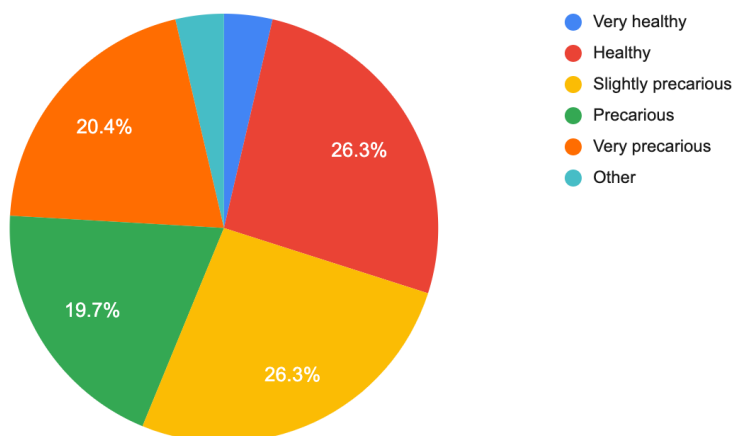
Moral Hazards: Financial wellbeing

The low average income and lack of entitlements is reflected in reported financial wellbeing. **40% described their financial wellbeing as precarious or very precarious.**

Fig 25. Financial wellbeing

How would you describe your financial wellbeing (i.e. your capacity to live comfortably on your current wage/salary)?

137 responses



All “Other” responses were **negative**, with respondents stating they could not afford to work in the arts without support from loved ones or indicated the severe impact their financial state has on their mental health:

- “So inconsistent I am in constant anxiety”
- “I am considering quitting, I am exhausted”

As such, **51.5% reported struggling to pay for essentials** at least monthly.

Fig 26. Ability to pay for essentials

How often do you struggle to pay for basic essentials?

136 responses

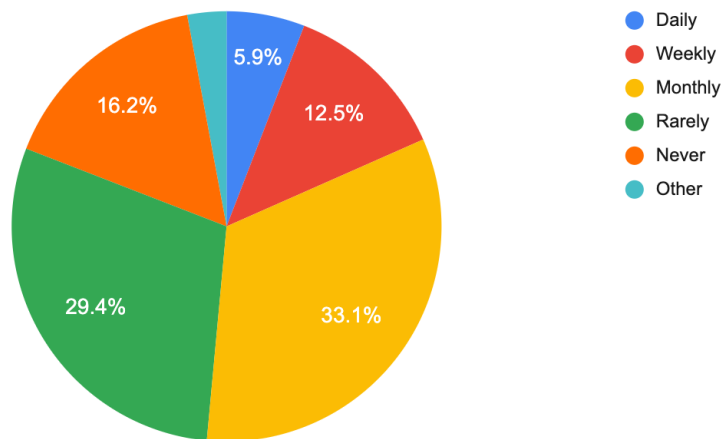
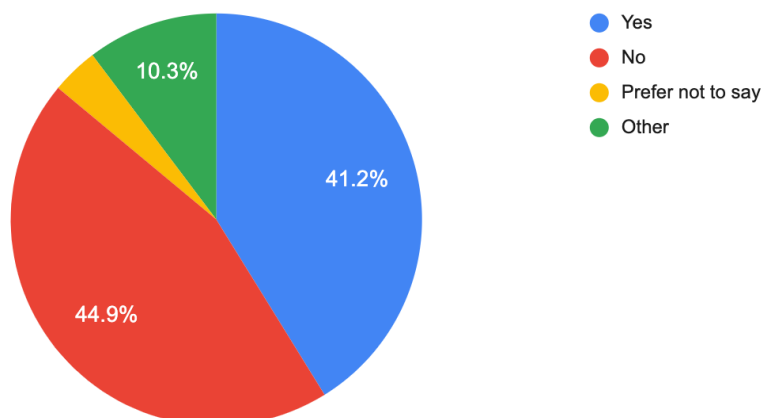


Fig 27. Work outside the sector

Do you have to work another job to supplement your income in the arts/creative industries?

136 responses



Unsurprisingly, **41.2% reported needing to work outside of the sector** to supplement their income. From the “Other” responses, many reported working multiple roles in the arts or that they have considered leaving the sector to find stable work (Table 2).

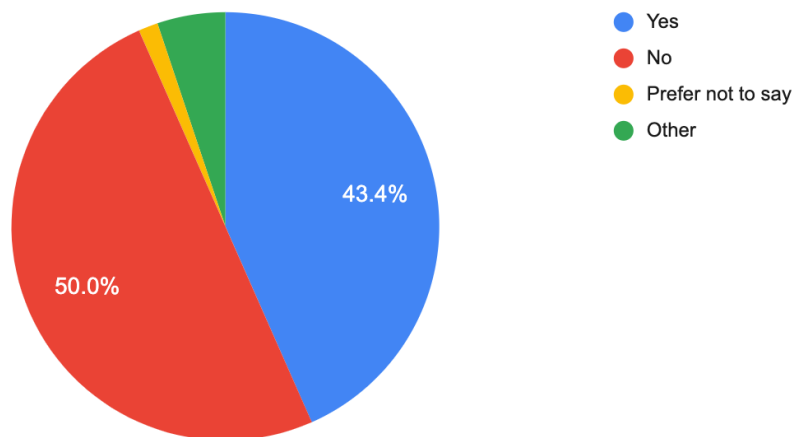
Table 2. Work outside the sector “other” responses

Response category	Responses
Work multiple arts roles	7
Considered/actively searching for work outside the sector	3
Living with a disability/receiving a pension	3
Other	1

Fig 28. Financial support

Do you live with a partner/spouse/family member who has a salaried job where you are financially supported?

136 responses



43% also reported that they are **supported financially by others** in their household. Of the 5% that responded with ‘Other’, responses predominantly stated their partner’s work is also precarious.

Physical Hazards: Alcohol consumption at work

The survey asked respondents to disclose how often alcohol is provided at work, splitting the questions into their experiences as an arts worker and an artist to determine if alcohol is more commonly provided to one or the other.

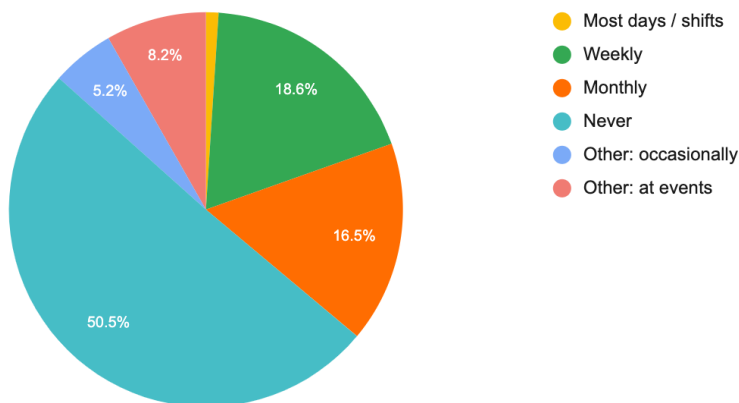
51% of **arts workers** stated they are never provided with alcohol at work, with 19% stating that it is provided weekly and 17% monthly (Figure 29). No arts workers indicated that they are provided with alcohol every day/shift. Despite this, it is still much higher than the wider workplace average, with research indicating that only 9% of Australian workers drink alcohol at work².

² https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/9874553/VH_Alcohol_related_harm_08.pdf

Fig 29. Arts workers: alcohol at work

As an arts worker, how often is alcohol provided as part of, or in addition to, your wage/salary (e.g. office drinks)?

97 valid responses

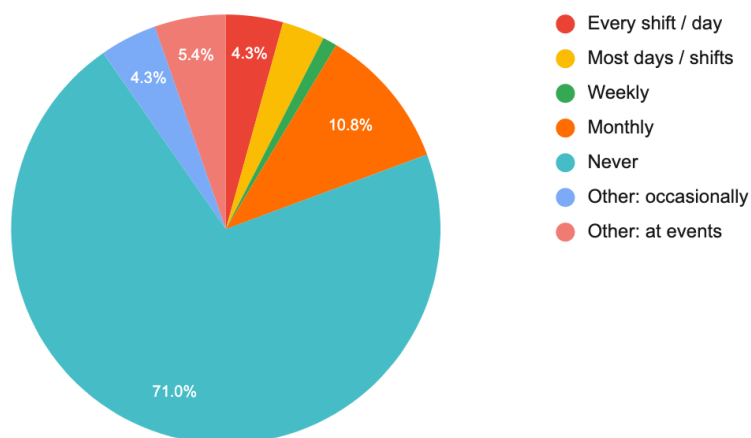


In contrast, 71% of **artists** state they are never provided with alcohol at work. However, **4% of artists stated that alcohol is provided every day/shift**; almost all of these were from the **music sector**, indicating that provision of alcohol is more of a concern for this sector than others in the arts. This is likely due to the high prevalence of hospitality riders in this sector, combined with the context of musicians working late at night in live music/hospitality venues surrounded by high alcohol consumption³.

Fig 30. Artists: alcohol at work

As an artist, how often is alcohol provided as part of, or in addition to, your wage/salary (e.g. as part of a rider)?

91 valid responses

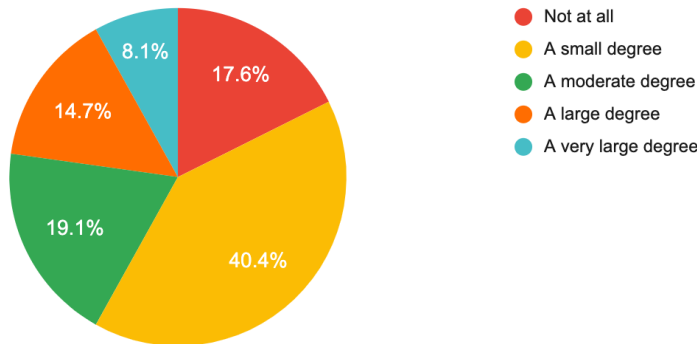


³ <https://adf.org.au/insights/aod-workplace-safety/>

Fig 31. Perceptions of alcohol consumption in the arts

To what degree is the consumption of alcohol associated with working in your sector?

136 responses



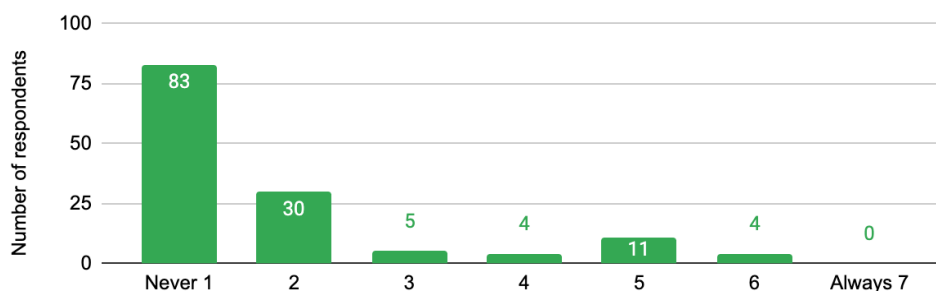
Interestingly, the perceptions of alcohol consumption are higher than the reported consumption. **42% associate the sector with alcohol consumption** to a moderate degree, large degree or very large degree. This is possibly due to the consumption in the sector being higher than the national average.

There is also some indication that artists and arts workers feel pressure to drink to gain opportunities, with 26% giving this a rating 4 or higher on a scale of 1 (Never) to 7 (Always).

Fig 32. Pressure to drink

How often do you feel pressured to drink in order to gain further professional opportunities?

137 responses



Psychosocial Hazards: Relationships at work

Given the context in which artists and arts workers are employed, the research sought to investigate the prevalence of interpersonal conflict at work. The prevalence in the wider community is already high, with the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) reporting that between 30 and 50 per cent of a manager’s time is spent managing workplace conflict⁴. Given this, responses rated 4 or higher on a scale of 1 (Never) to 7 (Always) were considered as showing a higher frequency of experiencing conflict.

- 30% rated workplace disagreements as 4 or higher (Fig. 33).
- 27% rated conflicts of ideas as 4 or higher (Fig. 34).
- 29% rated bad feelings amongst co-workers as 4 or higher (Fig. 35).
- 31% rated personality conflicts as 4 or higher (Fig. 36).

Fig 33. Disagreements

Do you and members of your workplace/team/project disagree about the work being done?

135 responses

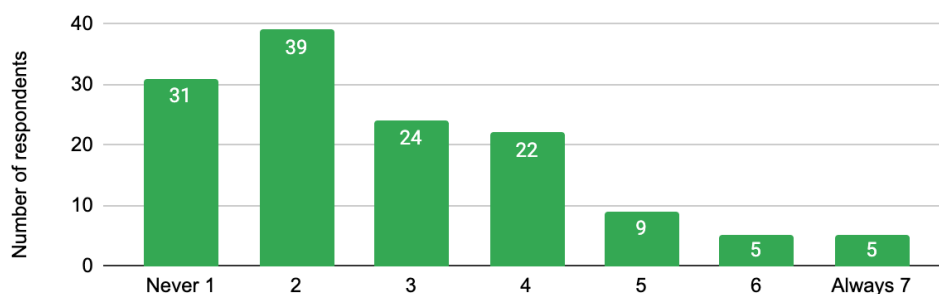
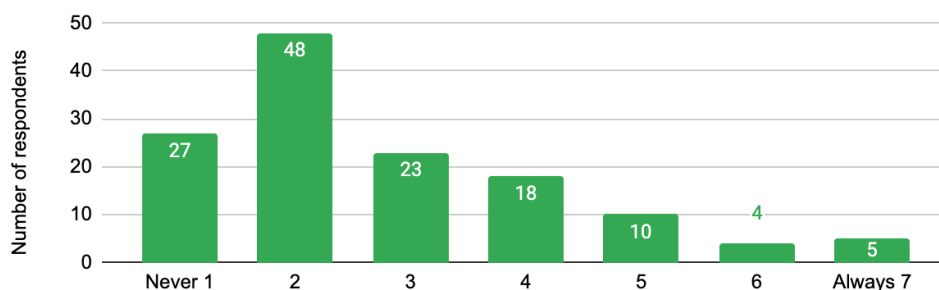


Fig 34. Conflicts of ideas

Are there conflicts about ideas between you and members of your workplace/team/project?

135 responses



⁴ <https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/workforce-capability-leadership-and-management/managing-negative-behaviours/developing-conflict-resilient-workplaces/report-2-the-potential-for-change/>

Fig 35. Bad feelings between colleagues

Are there bad feelings among members in your workplace/team/project?

133 responses

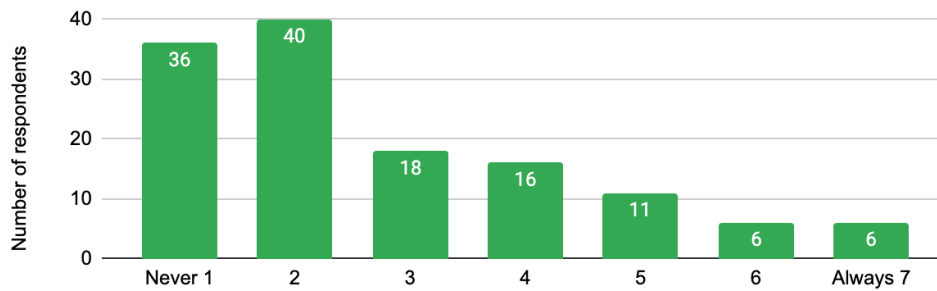
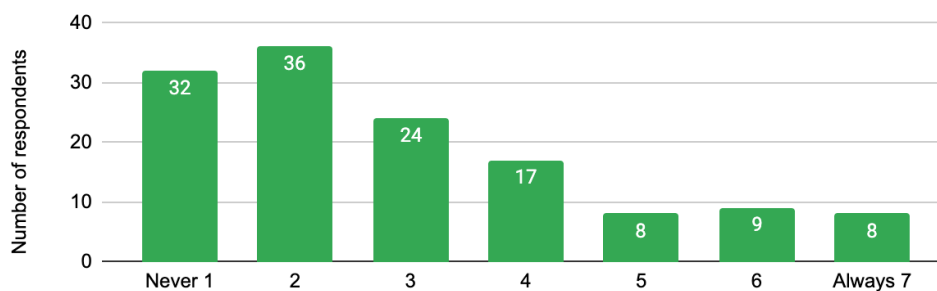


Fig 36. Personality conflicts

Are personality conflicts evidenced in your workplace/team/project?

134 responses



Psychosocial Hazards: Bullying, Harassment and Cultural Safety

In the last 6 months, **36% had experienced bullying at work**, with 15% rating the frequency as 4 or higher. This is much higher than the 2016 national average of 9.7%⁵, but a decrease from the 2016 People At Work (PAW) report⁶, which found the Arts & Recreation Services industry had the highest experience of bullying prevalence (51% reported rarely to almost daily).

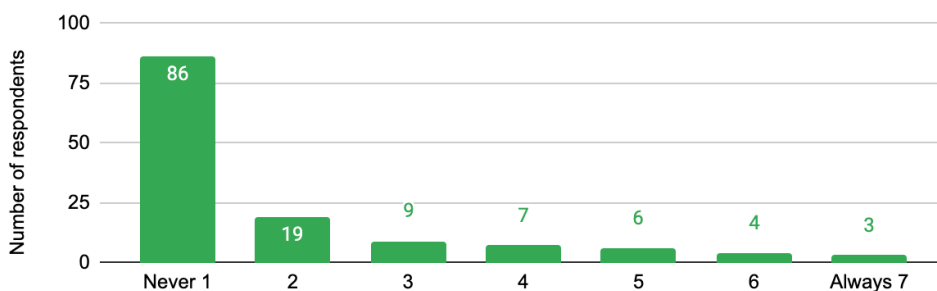
⁵ <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1705/bullying-and-harassment-in-australian-workplaces-australian-workplace-barometer-results.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.peopleatwork.gov.au/assets/pdf/PAW%20final%20report.pdf>

Fig 37. Experiences of bullying

In the past 6 months, have you been subjected to workplace bullying in your workplace/team/project?

134 responses

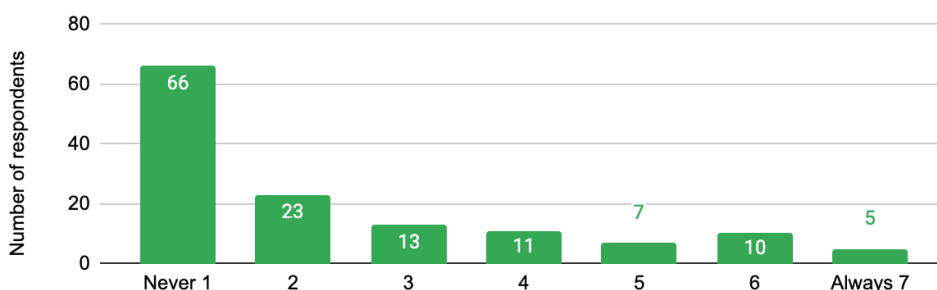


Further to this, **51% had witnessed workplace bullying**, with 33% giving a frequency of 4 or higher, which while high, is lower than the 64% in the Arts & Recreation Services Sector in the 2016 PAW Report.

Fig 38. Witnessing bullying

In the past 6 months, have you witnessed workplace bullying in your workplace/team/project?

135 responses

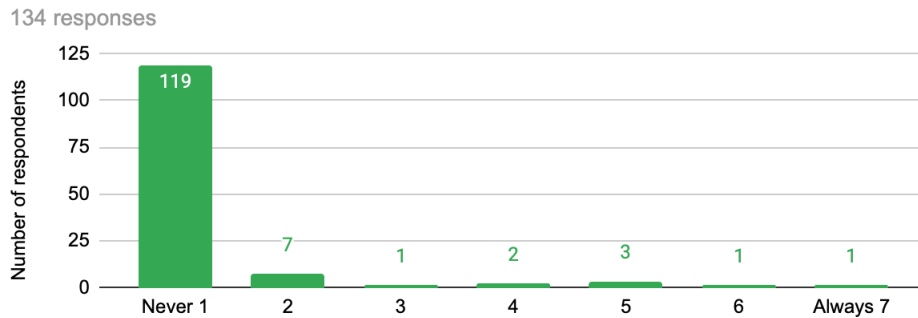


Alarmingly, **11% have experienced threats of violence** at work in the last 6 months, with 5% ranking the frequency as 4 or higher, which is higher than the Australian average⁷.

⁷ https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Work-related-violence-and-aggression_Report_August2024.pdf

Fig 39. Threats of violence

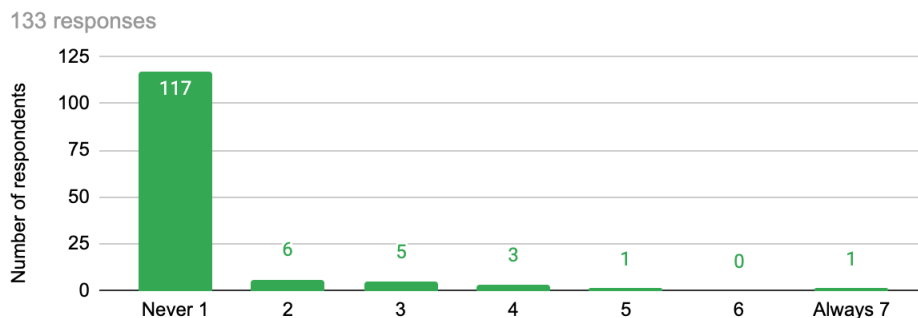
In the past 6 months, have you been exposed to threats of work-related violence?



A further **12% have experienced sexual harassment** in the last 6 months, with 4% rating the frequency as 4 or higher.

Fig 40. Experiences of sexual harassment

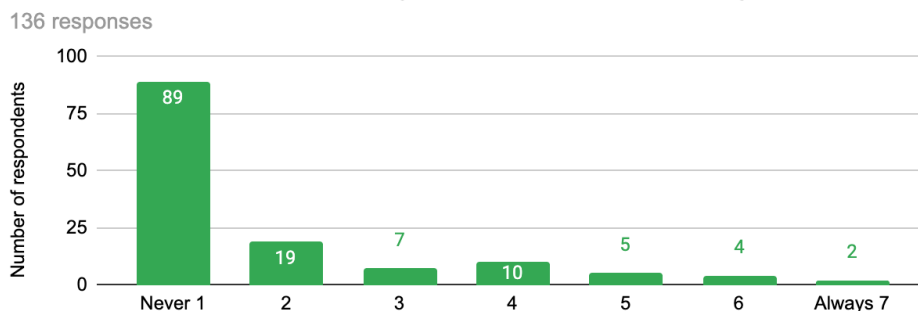
In the past 6 months, have you been subjected to sexual harassment in your workplace/team/project?



35% were exposed to culturally unsafe practices, with 15% ranking the frequency as 4 or higher. This is especially concerning given only 4.4% of respondents are of Aboriginal descent.

Fig 41. Experiences of culturally unsafe practices

In the past 6 months, have you been subjected to culturally unsafe practices and behaviours in your workplace/team/project?



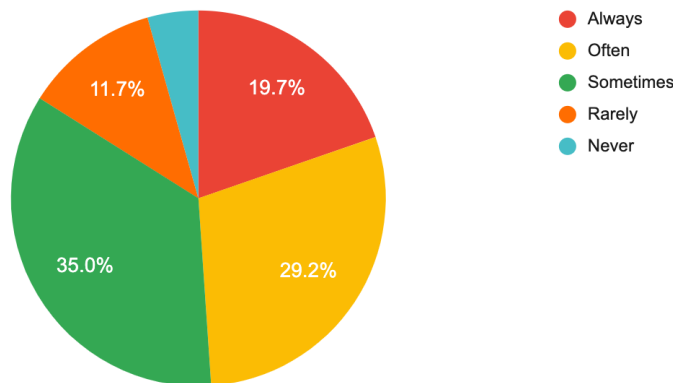
The preface to this question in the survey framed this in relation to cultural background, rather than broader interpretations of cultural safety such as in relation to gender, sexuality or poor workplace duty of care, however some respondents may have interpreted the question in a broader sense. No data was collected in this survey in relation to CALD backgrounds or sexuality. This is a potential area for future research. However, responses to other questions raise concern regarding the poor workplace practices leading to poor duty of care.

Despite the high prevalence of bullying, culturally unsafe practices, threats of violence and sexual harassment, 49% of respondents stated that they ‘Always’ or ‘Often’ feel like they belong to or are part of a community, emphasising the sense of community support felt by artists and arts workers.

Fig 42. Sense of community

How often do you feel like you belong to or are part of a community?

137 responses



Mental Health

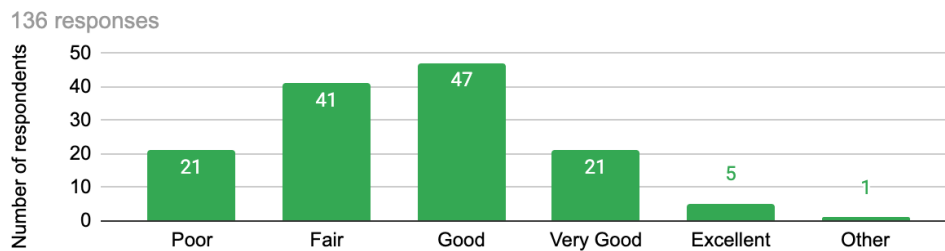
Unsurprisingly given previous responses, reports of poor mental health were common:

- **46%** described their **mental health as ‘Poor’ or ‘Fair’**
- **46%** said they **felt tired, sluggish or depressed ‘Always’ or ‘Often’**
- **66%** scored a 4 or higher in the last 4 weeks to the question asking how often they **felt tired for no good reason**
- **36%** scored a 4 or higher in the last 4 weeks to the question asking how often they **felt so sad that nothing could cheer them up**
- **49%** said they **feel anxious or overwhelmed ‘Always’ or ‘Often’**
- **56%** scored a 4 or higher in the last 4 weeks to the question asking how often they **felt nervous**

These statistics are substantially higher than the national average, where 21.6% reported a mental health disorder in the last 12 months and 16.6% reported an anxiety disorder.⁸

Fig 43. Mental health

How would you describe your mental health overall?



Additional comments included:

"...I should be retired but I need some income due to my years of lower pay in the Arts sector."

"Suicidal due to ongoing precarity of work and devaluation"

Fig 44. Fatigue and depression

How often do you feel tired, sluggish or depressed?

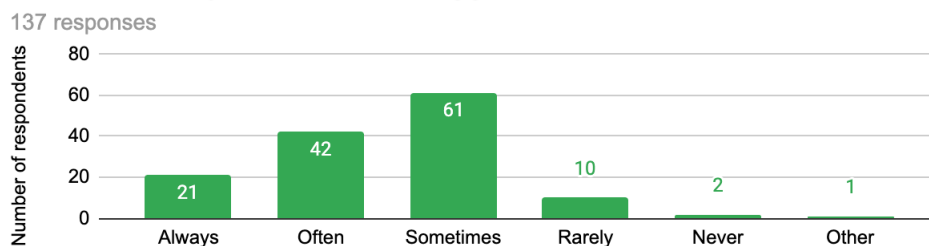
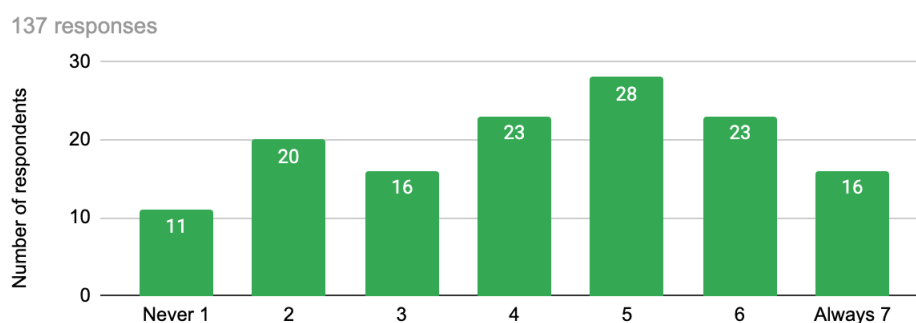


Fig 45. Fatigue

In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel tired for no good reason?



⁸ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/2020-2022>

Fig 46. Depression

In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel so sad, nothing could cheer you up?

135 responses

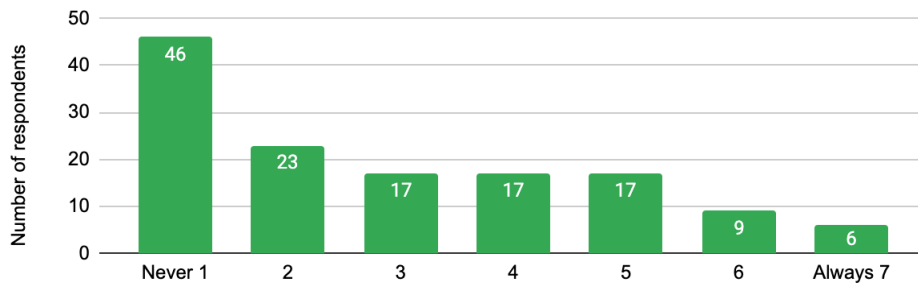


Fig 47. Anxiety and overwhelm

How often do you feel anxious or overwhelmed?

136 responses

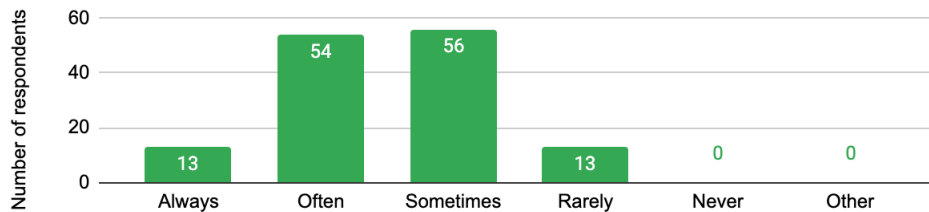
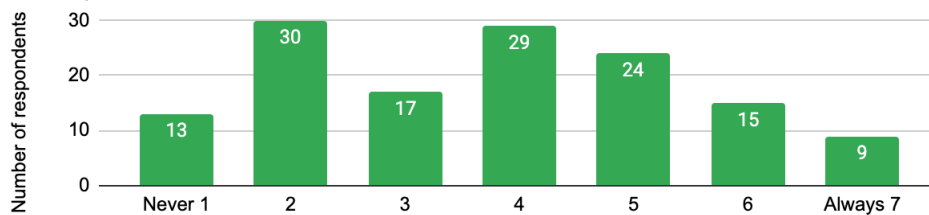


Fig 48. Nervousness

In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel nervous?

137 responses



Together, these indicate a high prevalence of poor mental health and burnout in the sector greater than the national average, which is consistent with other arts sector research, such as the work by Support Act⁹ and Kate Larsen.¹⁰

⁹ <https://supportact.org.au/individual-support/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support/mental-health-survey/>

¹⁰ <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/features/post-covid-or-post-burnout-less-is-necessary-2578519/>

Additional comments

There were 40 responses to the final question “Any other comments or feedback?”. Many of them were clarifications on the specific context behind their answers, or notes of thanks to AICSA for conducting the research.

However, there were common themes amongst the responses:

- Feedback on questionnaire, including difficulty of responding as an artist/sole trader, difficulty untangling answers such as harassment between their work as an arts worker and artist
- Comments on very low pay for artists and NFP workers
- Sentiment that they could be paid more in another sector
- Sentiment that the low pay and insecurity has limited or delayed other life goals such as having a family
- Expressing that artists do not have the support networks of organisations and are without basic entitlements like fair pay, superannuation
- Sense of the arts being undervalued
- Exploitation and the expectation of work for free
- The severe impact of their working situation on their mental health
- Alcohol use, particularly for musicians
- Sexual harassment
- Bullying
- Cultural safety

Extracts addressing these topics are below.

On low pay:

“I work for an NFP and earn a significantly lower salary than what's possible for similar private sector roles. There is no justification for this beyond 'the sector is under resourced' - which for me, doesn't cut it. Given that most funding sourced are focused on outcomes, the only way to increase financial resources is to add more programming - which is often counterproductive. More funding is needed for organisations to remunerate staff at appropriate levels and in step with inflation and cost of living pressures. One of the main contributors to anxiety and burn out (for me) is the knowledge that there is zero possibility of wage growth within my role and more broadly, within the sector.”

“Artists are workers too, we need a wage and support and financial stability to keep creating. This survey didn’t cover cost of living rises and how those of us who only get money for paintings or demonstrations survive on such low income.”

“I wouldn't play music if I wasn't working elsewhere. Making a living through music, outside of cover acts, feels impossible.”

“Performing artists have been getting paid the same amount for the last 20 years on average. I’ve seen many friends in the arts burn out after 10 years as the prospect of getting paid minimum wage seems impossible, all the while they become addicted to alcohol due to every gig having free access to it. It’s a broken system where bookers, venues, managers, promoters all get a wage but artists are still expected to work long hours to improve their art form on virtually nothing. The effects this has on the mental health of artists is not sustainable. I play in a “successful” touring band (interstate & international) but still struggle to pay my bills, eat, pay for petrol, basic commodities every week.”

“The pay as a musician is non-existent if you play original music and you NEVER get superannuation or any other protections. Everyone else gets their cut before you do, so it’s very demoralising that you bring in the crowd and top up everyone else’s livelihoods (venues, agents, promoters, sound engineers etc) while not being compensated adequately.”

On exploitation:

“The general expectation to work for months on end, unpaid and unreasonable overtime is truly appalling.”

“There is still an expectation of artists and arts workers doing unpaid work.”

“The Arts industry is in very poor shape. No one cares if you stay or go. Arts workers are here because we love it, but this is sometimes taken advantage of.”

"I've ... frequently seen big players [redacted] ask for people to work casual shifts below minimum wage cash in hand (presumably no workcover/super [sic] etc), or volunteer for long shifts in a way that violates the Fair Work Act. It's exploitative and unsafe."

On harassment, bullying, cultural safety and lack of protections:

"While my day job is safe and free from bullying and sexual harassment, I commonly encounter this as an artist."

"There are no protections for freelance artists. I have contacted the union on multiple occasions as a member and they have been unable to help me with contracts that have given me half the pay of the contract originally promised. In my first contract after graduating [art discipline] school I was sexually assaulted then blacklisted as a liability for speaking out. Nobody advocates for me but me, which is awkward with employers. If I get injured there is no safety net, as my insurance only covers other [discipline] work already locked in (which it never is). It's a completely unsustainable way of living. I have had to fight for Super in addition to my contract pay."

"Aboriginal arts workers are often having to work in culturally unsafe positions especially in the Museum and Gallery sector. Aboriginal people are not supported to be promoted into leadership positions, we are often overlooked and on our own within teams or a whole workplace. We carry a Colonial (cultural) load, and bring knowledge and experiences that can be used with our voices but are often taken by white researchers."

On impact on life milestones:

"I feel like choosing to pursue the arts has cost me the chance to have a family, because the work is insecure and poorly paid, even though I am excellent, loyal (over 5 years of consecutive 12 month contracts), and essential at my job."

"I am now retired from my supporting work as a designer but continue to pursue my career as a visual artist. Having to support a family has seriously delayed my real objective. It is sad to see politicians support football and completely ignore the arts. It makes artists more of an undervalued outsider than they should be."

"As I get older I want to have a house, or a pet. I will never have these things if I continue in the arts."

Conclusion

The survey results show that artists and arts workers are overworked and underpaid, with a high proportion of poverty wages, precarity and lack of basic entitlements/protectations such as superannuation. This is impacting on their life pathways, financial stability and wellbeing.

Combined with a high frequency of exposure to bullying and culturally unsafe practices, as reported by the survey respondents, these conditions contribute to poor mental health in the arts, with high indications of anxiety and depression above the national average.

Policy change and industry specific support is needed urgently to address these systemic issues.

Recommendations

- AICSA to campaign to improve awareness of poor salaries, wages, support mechanisms and working conditions in the arts.
- AICSA to advocate to improve salaries, wages, support mechanisms and working conditions in the arts.
- AICSA to provide workshops and resources to assist artists, arts workers and arts organisations improve WHS and wellbeing.
- AICSA to host workshop to obtain data on WHS and wellbeing for young people in the arts
- To conduct further research into artist remuneration.
- To conduct further research into the prevalence of superannuation payments.
- To conduct further research into cultural safety.

Support Services

Please find the following mental health services available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

[Support Act Wellbeing Helpline](#) (for arts industry specific support): 1800 959 500

[Lifeline](#): 13 11 14

[Suicide Call Back Service](#): 1300 659 467

[MensLine Australia](#): 1300 789 978

[StandBy - Support After Suicide](#): 1300 727 247

Acknowledgements

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