

NEWS Special report

Report reveals widespread bullying and harassment

The past few months have been characterised by a string of harassment and abuse allegations across a wide range of industries, both in the UK and worldwide. This was prompted by the revelations surrounding Hollywood movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, which became a catalyst for further allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment and abuse in the wider entertainment industry, and in theatre.

Following this, The Stage carried out a survey to determine the scale to which harassment and bullying has affected, and continues to affect, theatre and performing arts professionals and to investigate whether there were any parts of the industry particularly hard hit.

It was distributed to a database of registered users of The Stage in November 2017 and was carried out over a 10-day period by 1,755 people with 1,050 completing all key questions.

It collected the data of those who work, have previously worked, or are training to work in

theatre, and their experiences of harassment and bullying in a professional environment.

Respondents were asked a series of demographic questions in order to establish categories within the results. This meant the results could identify areas of the industry and groups of people more at risk than others.

The following pages feature analysis based on the answers given by the survey's respondents, including anonymous anecdotal comments that were submitted alongside the data-focused questions.

NOTES ON GRAPHS

The graphs on the following pages include analysis of a selection of results to two questions in the survey. One asked respondents about their experiences of harassment and bullying at work, left, and the other about their experiences of reporting this behaviour, right.

The graphs, and those on subsequent pages, are based on how a selection of respondents answered these questions, and highlight a number of groups.

When answering the question on their experiences of harassment and bullying, respondents could choose more than one option.

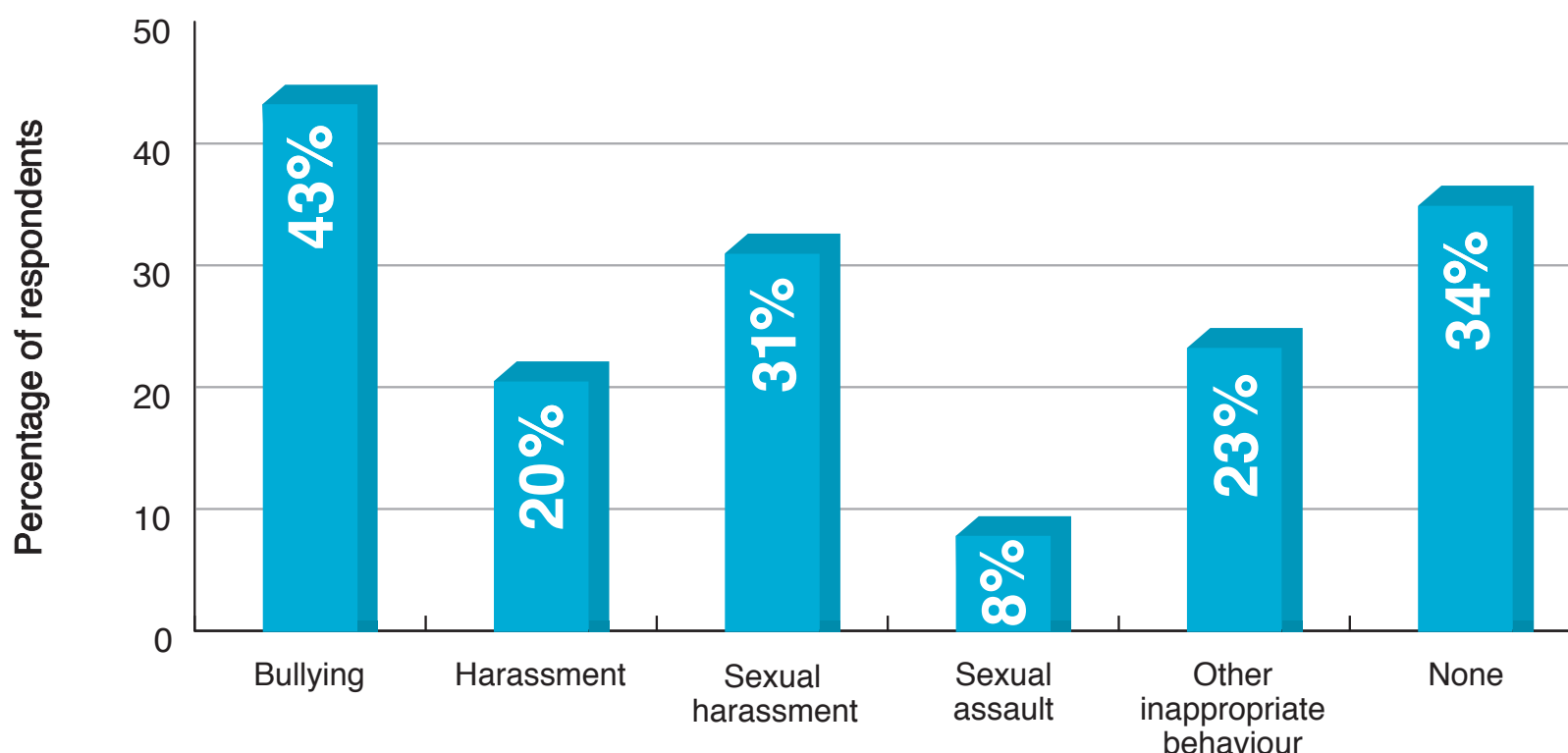
Four roles in the industry are covered in the following analysis – performer, backstage/technical, creative and PR/marketing. These have been chosen as they represent the four largest shares of respondents, however those taking the survey were able to choose from a variety of options.

Respondents indicated whether they were working freelance, as a member of staff or were a student when they encountered harassment, or if it occurred over a period of time in which they performed various roles. Only the first three are included in the following analysis.

It should also be noted that while percentages have been rounded, the bars on the graphs represent the precise number.

For a full list of the questions asked and options to answer, see thestage.co.uk

Have you personally experienced any form of harassment or bullying in the workplace?



The industry responds 'Whatever your job, dignity at work should be yours and everyone has a role to play'

The overall results highlighted that 43% of theatre professionals had been bullied at work.

The survey showed 31% of respondents said they had experienced sexual harassment, with 20% – one in five – claiming to have been harassed. Respondents who said they had been sexually assaulted came to 8%.

Industry bodies and unions have spoken out following the public allegations of harassment and abuse in theatre that prompted The Stage's research. The Stage shared the report's preliminary findings with several organisations. Here, they respond.

BECTU

"A lot of theatre work may take place in the shadows but responses to this necessary survey point to a pressing need to shine a light on employment practice within theatre.

"Whether you're working as staff or freelance, and whatever your job, dignity at work should be yours and everyone has a role to play in delivering that. That message, backed by sound policies and investment in staff, should be in all theatres. All theatre employers have a legal duty and need to create the right environment to support those who suffer mistreatment. We in BECTU are ready to play our part."

Equity

"Bullying and sexual harassment are not acceptable. Workers in the creative industries deserve to be treated with the same respect as other sectors of the economy and Equity will continue to challenge employers who abuse our members.

"The union recognises that members may not report bullying and harassment because they fear losing work. Members should be reassured that they can talk to the union in complete confidence.

"Equity will be publishing its solutions to the sexual harassment crisis in February."

Society of London Theatre/UK Theatre

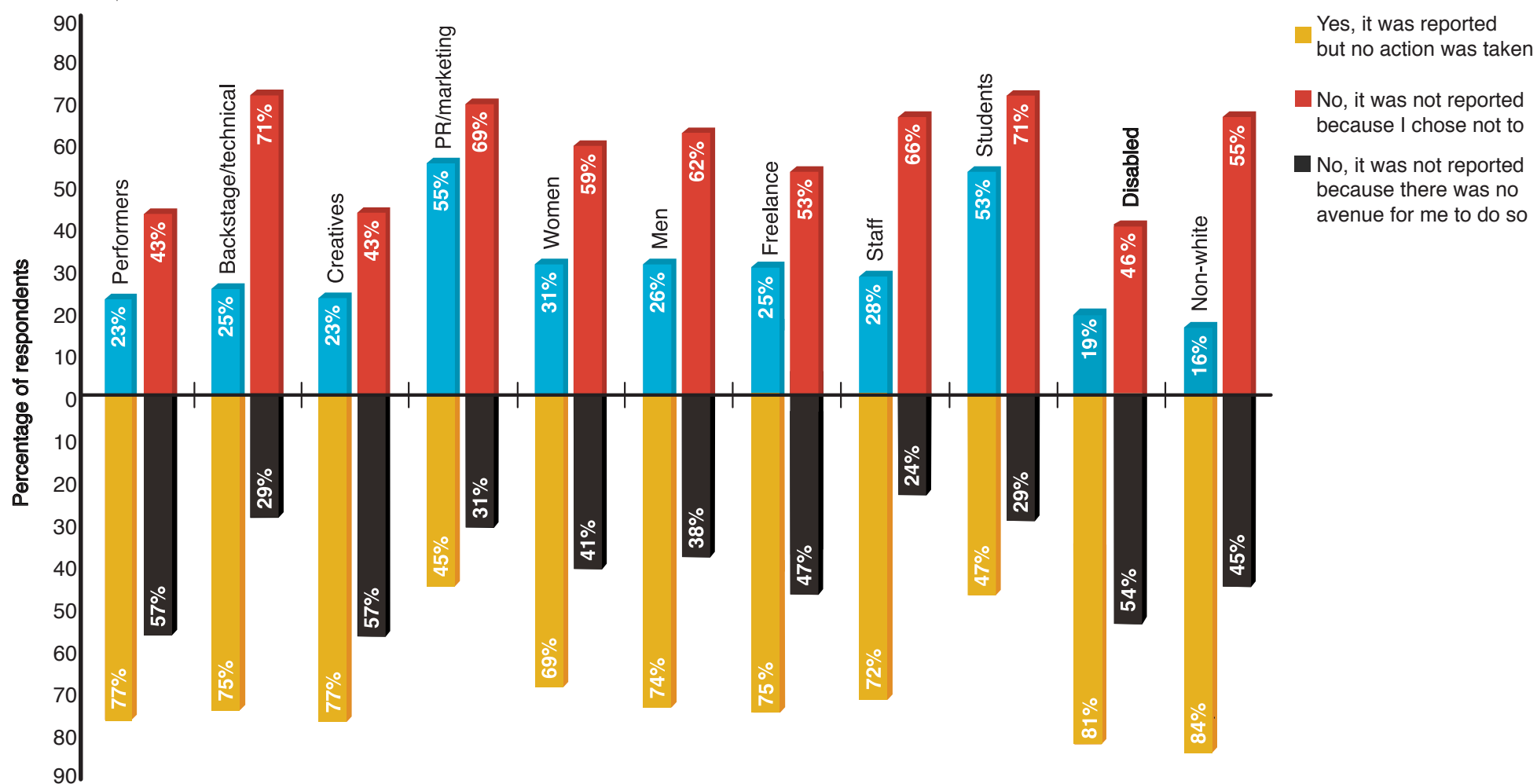
"As allegations of harassment and abuses of power emerged, the industry was united in a call to create an environment where unacceptable behaviour is always addressed.

"SOLT and UK Theatre have acted to ensure members, and the industry, are able to share and develop policies and practices that mean theatre is a safe and supportive working environment for everyone. We are holding open forums across the UK that will inform training and initiatives. It is vital that many voices contribute to these conversations, so that lasting and meaningful change takes place."

Inside the story

‘I never reported it, as it was deemed normal’

Was this behaviour reported?



‘As an actor, you risk not being employed again’

Theatre professionals who experience harassment and bullying choose not to report it because the behaviour is so “normalised” by the industry, The Stage’s survey reveals.

In wide-ranging comments given as part of the survey, respondents also raise concerns that there are no proper channels through which to report abuse and that speaking out will damage their reputation or cost them jobs in the future.

The survey shows that more than two-thirds of respondents (67%) who experienced inappropriate behaviour did not report it, with 27% saying they did not report because it was felt there was no avenue to do so.

One respondent wrote: “It has never been clear to me how to report. I am not sure I even considered it worth reporting at the time, but I see now that is because it’s so normalised.”

‘It is a given thing in the industry. You have to shrug it off’

Another wrote: “I never reported it because it was deemed normal behaviour.”

One theatre worker stated that the nature of the industry – including the hours worked, the intensity of the job and the “proximity of working” – encouraged a working environment in which physical contact is the norm, while another said they had been “bullied and disrespected so much within this industry” that they had stopped realising “how absurd it is”.

Another said: “It is very much a given thing in the industry. Like most people, you have to be thick-skinned and shrug it off.”

Some also commented on how those behind the harassment were often at the top of the companies they were working for, which made it harder to report harassment or bullying.

One wrote: “I was bullied repeatedly at work by my boss over a six-year period. It was impossible to report as she owned the company.”

Many expressed concern that they would not work again if they reported a concern.

“As an actor, you are bottom of the pile and you risk not being employed again,” one said.

Another wrote of her experience working with a director who made an all-female cast “kiss and hold each other as he took pictures”.

“He made it clear that if we did not do so then we would not be able to be part of the company any more,” she added.

Another said: “I have never spoken about or reported any of these incidents. I knew without doubt that it would go against me if I did.”

‘I felt like a shadow of my former self’

Theatre workers revealed how harassment in the sector has left them feeling “devalued and belittled”, with some suffering depression as a result.

Personal experiences reported in the survey range from theatre professionals being verbally abused to reports of rape, with many citing times they had been sexually and physically abused while at work. They report feeling depressed and isolated as a result.

One theatre professional revealed how they were “threatened, bullied, sexually harassed, sexually assaulted and demeaned” over 18 months by a fellow performer.

“The effect this had on me was completely crippling and eventually resulted in me leaving the production severely depressed, and feeling like a shadow of my former self,” they wrote, adding: “I chose to make myself unemployed rather than continue with the contract.”

Another revealed how there was a “culture of bullying in the workplace”, which their supervisor had “allowed to continue, unchecked”.

“Ultimately the stress caused me to become ill and I was put on antidepressants,” they said.

‘The effect this had on me was completely crippling. I chose to make myself unemployed rather than continue with the contract’

Another wrote of their experience at the hands of their agent. “He sexually abused me and also physically hurt me. He broke me and caused me real distress,” they wrote.

One theatre worker revealed how they had been “systematically disrespected, devalued and belittled” by a colleague.

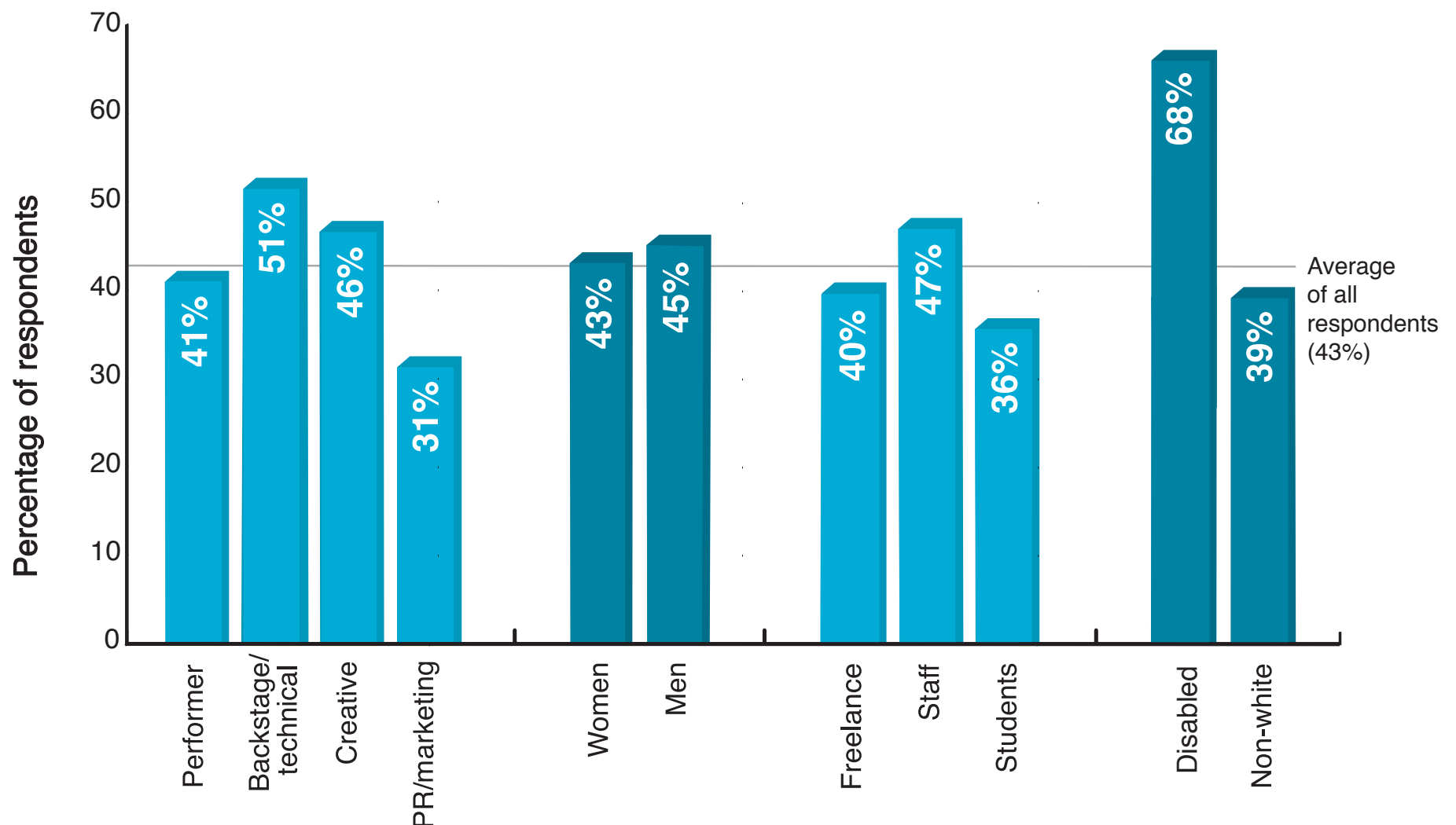
“I was torn apart mentally, made to second-guess everything about my capabilities and told I was not good enough. I felt trapped and unable to extricate myself from the situation without seriously harming my career and the fallout should I leave,” they wrote.

Reporting by Georgia Snow and Matthew Hemley

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Bullying

Unfair treatment more likely for backstage workers and people with disabilities



Graph represents the percentage of respondents in different categories who said they had experienced bullying at work

Definition

Bullying is defined by Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) as any unwanted behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated, degraded, humiliated or offended.

Examples include spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone, exclusion or victimisation, unfair treatment or deliberately undermining a competent worker by constant criticism. It can happen face-to-face, by letter, email, phone or on social media.

A particular problem

The survey's results highlighted bullying as the most common occurrence of workplace harassment in the theatre industry.

An average of 43% of respondents who answered the question on this topic said they had experienced it at some point in their careers, and it was consistently highlighted in respondents' answers as a particular problem in the industry.

It was more prevalent in some groups of respondents, for example individuals employed in backstage and technical roles were the most likely section of the workforce to describe

This is the only category of workplace harassment that male respondents were more likely to have experienced



More than half of those who work in backstage and technical roles said they had been bullied

incidences of bullying. More than half of those who work in this area of theatre said they had been bullied.

Inherent in the culture

One backstage worker said it was common for senior staff to give junior employees "undue, unfair and unnecessary criticism" to assert authority, making others feel "seriously uncomfortable".

Others reported a "culture of bullying in the workplace", with managers allowing bad behaviour to go unchecked.

Groups at risk

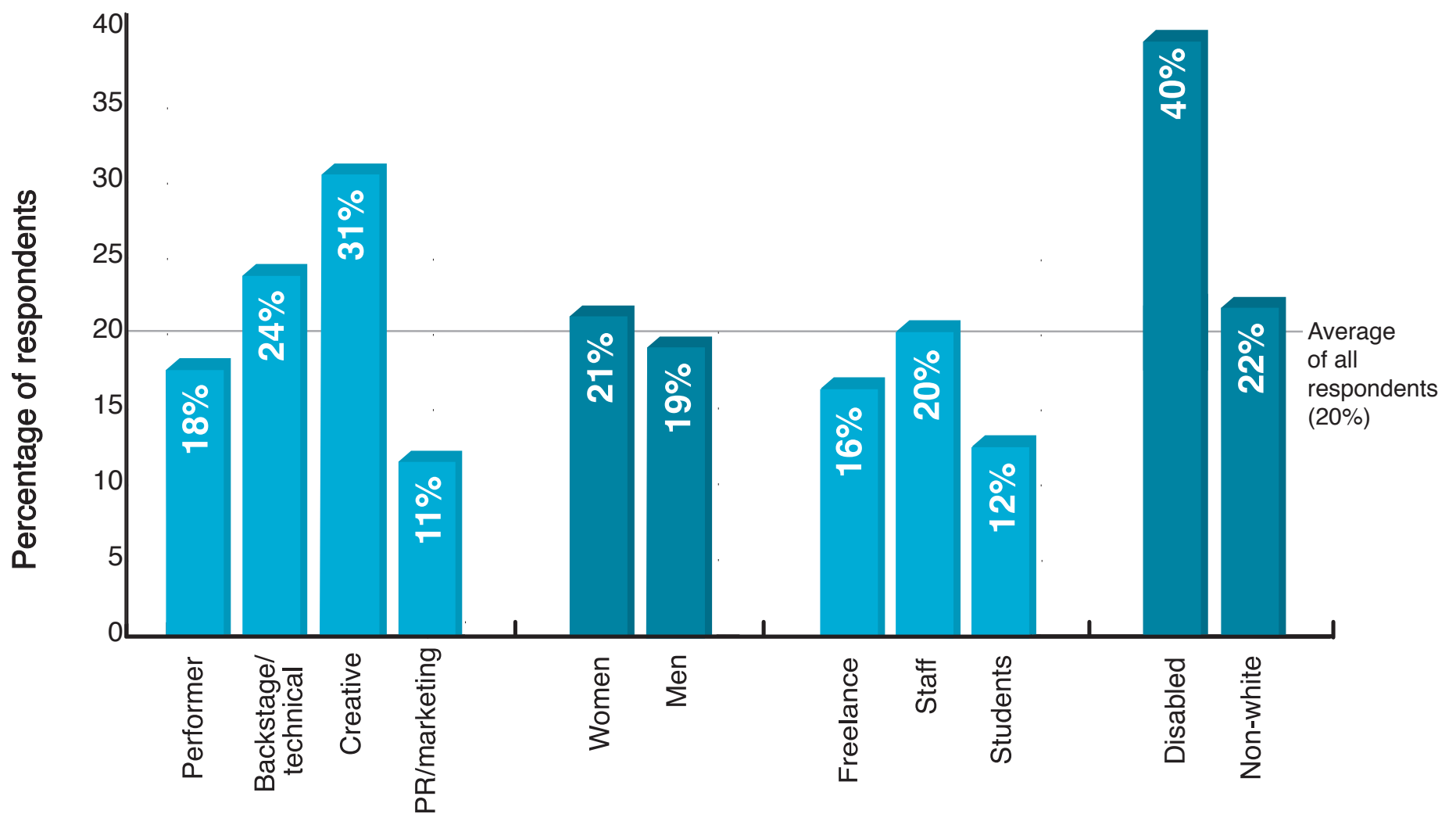
The majority (68%) of disabled workers answering the survey said they had been bullied at work. However, it is worth noting that the sample size for this area of respondents was relatively small.

Freelance respondents did not reveal as high a rate of bullying as their counterparts who work as members of staff at an organisation.

Overall, men were slightly more likely to be bullied than women. This is the only category of workplace harassment that male respondents were more likely to have experienced than women.

Harassment

Disabled workers, creative team members and women at highest risk



Graph represents the percentage of respondents in different categories who said they had experienced harassment at work

Behaviour that is defined as harassment is often similar to bullying – exclusion or victimisation, undermining competent workers by constant criticism, intimidation and humiliation.

What makes harassment illegal?

While bullying is not against the law harassment is, because it occurs when unwanted behaviour is related to one of the following: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In detail

Of those answering the question on workplace harassment and bullying, 20% said they had specifically experienced harassment.

Harassment was highest among respondents in creative roles such as directors and designers.

Of disabled respondents, 40% said they had suffered harassment. This is a lower proportion than the 68% that had experienced bullying, but is still well above the overall average.

A disabled performer said they had been regularly told audiences would find it ‘too depressing’ to see disabled people on stage

Harassment was highest among respondents in creative roles such as directors and designers

The anecdotal responses to the survey uncovered stories of persistent and long-term harassment around individuals’ disability as being a particular area of concern, with reports of inappropriate behaviour, gossip and rumours relating to a respondent’s mental and physical disabilities.

A disabled performer said they had been regularly told their disability would mean they would never get work in a certain area, and that audiences would find it “too depressing” to see disabled people on stage.

Specific identities

The survey also recorded stories of harassment related to respondents’ gender, ethnicity, age and sexuality.

Female backstage workers said harassment was particularly prevalent in their industry.

One respondent said: “I have been laughed at and undermined countless times during my technical and backstage work, by men who didn’t believe I was strong enough or knew enough technically.”

The survey showed harassment was more likely to occur when a person was working as a staff member at an organisation, than if they were freelance.

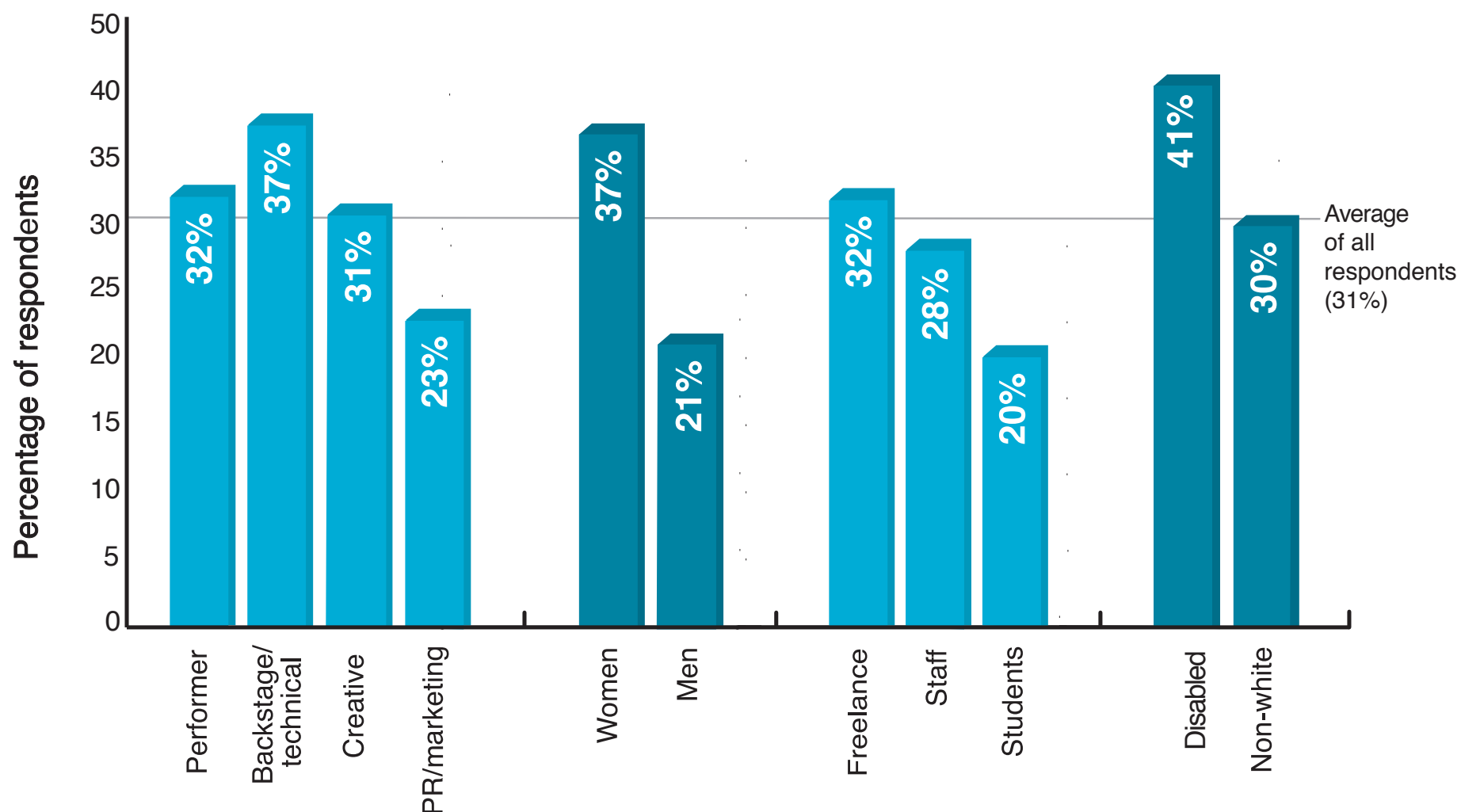


One respondent said: ‘I have been undermined countless times during my technical and backstage work, by men who didn’t believe I was strong enough or knew enough’

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Sexual harassment

Backstage staff, women and gay respondents more likely to be affected



Graph represents the percentage of respondents in different categories who said they had experienced sexual harassment at work

Citizens Advice defines sexual harassment as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, including sexual comments or jokes, displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature, sending emails with sexual content, and physical behaviour such as unwelcome sexual advances and touching.

One respondent was repeatedly asked to perform naked, despite the script not requiring it

One in three

Nearly one in three (31%) survey respondents said they had experienced sexual harassment at some point in their careers.

This ranged from inappropriate comments to unwanted sexual advances, touching and sexual intimidation.

More than 70% of individuals who said they had experienced sexual harassment did not report it, with some admitting they had never considered this to be an option.

Worse for women

Women were significantly more likely to experience sexual harassment than men, with 37% of female respondents to the relevant question answering they had been subject to sexual harassment.



Sexual harassment was more common among homosexual than heterosexual respondents

Of performers, 32% said they had been harassed sexually through their work. Of backstage staff, 37% said the same, as did 30% of creatives. One performer said they had been repeatedly asked to perform naked, despite the script not requiring it. They claim they were fired and recast when they refused.

Rates of sexual harassment were higher among freelance workers than staff.

In education

One in five students reported that they had been sexually harassed. Respondents said they had experienced older, male members of staff making sexual jokes about female students, while some told of receiving inappropriate text messages from tutors.

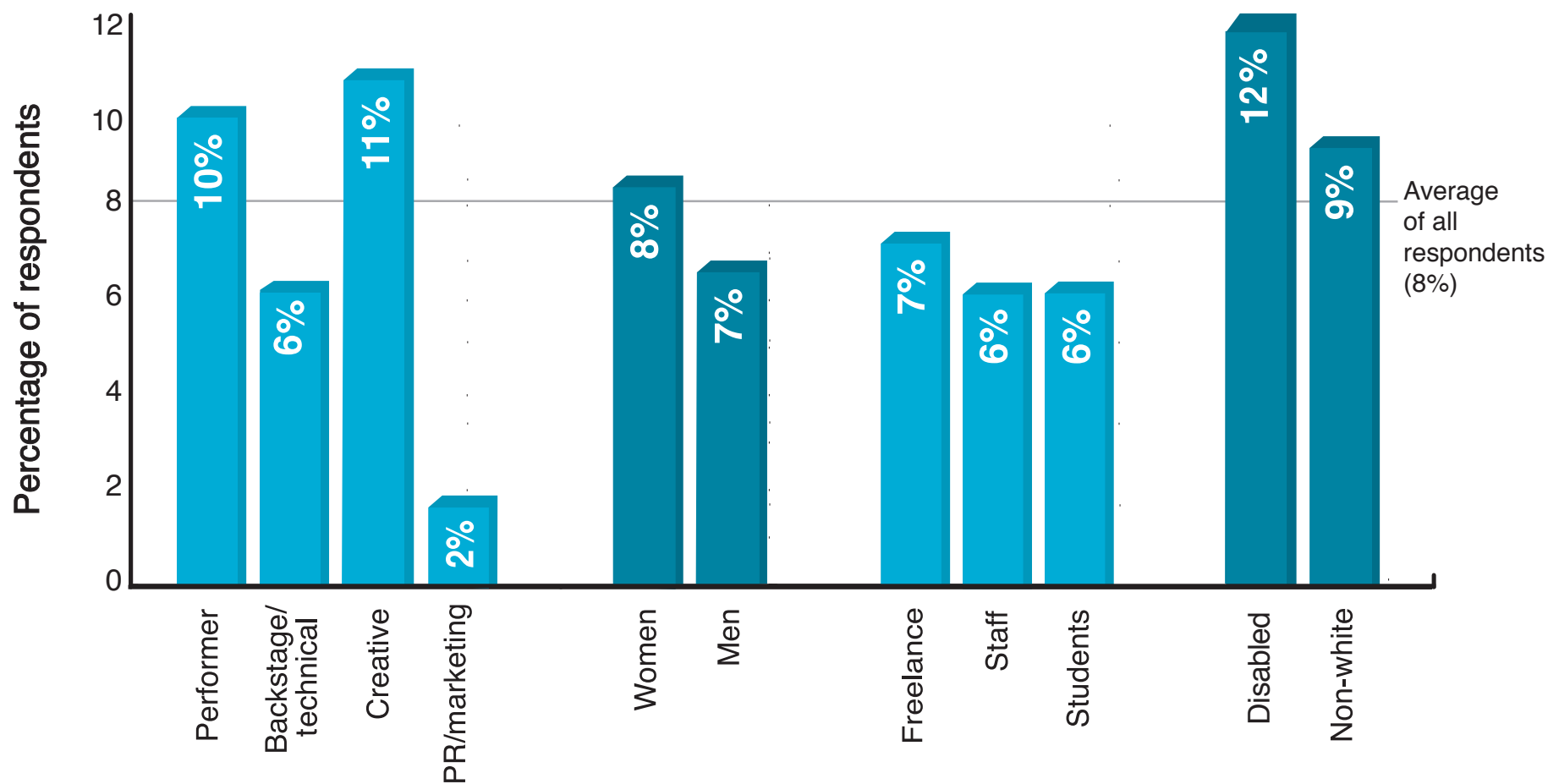
Sexuality

Sexual harassment was more commonly reported by homosexual respondents compared to heterosexual respondents – as were all forms of harassment or bullying analysed in the survey.

As part of the textual responses, gay men described experiences of being told that they should “use their sexuality” to progress their careers, as well as being sexually harassed by older and more senior figures.

Sexual assault

Multiple rape incidents and serious sexual assaults reported



Graph represents the percentage of respondents in different categories who said they had experienced sexual assault at work

Sexual assault is defined as intentional sexual conduct without consent. It is a criminal offence and can be committed by men and women. It is the most serious category in The Stage’s survey.

The numbers

Eight percent of respondents (81 individuals) to the question on harassment said they had been sexually assaulted.

Sexual assault includes rape, and there were several individual incidences of rape reported to the survey.

Worse for performers and creatives

One in 10 performers and 11% of creatives who told of their experiences said they had been sexually assaulted in the workplace.

Some performers said this had occurred during rehearsals for intimate scenes. Others described situations in which co-workers or fellow performers used seniority or star power to force unwanted sexual contact on others.

Respondents also said they had experienced behaviour they would class as sexual assault following social occasions with colleagues or at parties.

Some said they felt too scared to report it because of the impact it could have professionally

Of those who said they reported incidences of sexual assault, just one out of five people saw action taken as a result

Of those that said they had been sexually assaulted, 11% were students at the time.

Some respondents detailed incidences of sexual assault that occurred when they were under 18.

Little or nothing done about it

The survey asked respondents about their experiences of reporting inappropriate behaviour. Of those that said they reported incidences of sexual assault, just one out of five saw action taken as a result.

Of respondents that had been sexually assaulted, 64% did not report the behaviour at all. Some said they felt too scared to report it because of the impact it could have on them professionally.

Women made up 67% of the total respondents who said they experienced sexual assault, with men making up 31% and the remaining 2% identifying as gender variant.

