



## WOMEN IN LIVE MUSIC IN SOUTH AFRICA

*Representation, equity and safety for  
women in live music workplaces:  
data and insights*

August 2024  
IKS Cultural Consulting



Norwegian Embassy  
Pretoria



## FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the final report on "Women in Live Music," a study led by SAMRO through the Concerts SA programme in partnership with IKS Cultural Consulting. This study sheds light on women's experiences in a sector that has historically faced significant challenges related to gender equity and representation.

In a time characterised by fast-paced technological progress and unparalleled global challenges, the significance of thorough research cannot be emphasised enough. The research presented herein provides valuable insight into the world of women in live music, tackling important issues that continue to plague practitioners as they have done since time immemorial.



The voices captured in this report represent a diverse group of women, many of whom have dedicated years to their craft. Their experiences and insights are invaluable as we strive to foster an inclusive environment that recognises and celebrates women's contributions to live music.

The findings of this report are striking and call for our immediate attention. With 75% of respondents identifying as women, the data reveals a stark reality: over 60% of women experience inappropriate gender-related remarks, and a staggering 68% feel unsafe while commuting to work during late hours.

These statistics not only highlight the systemic issues of gender discrimination but also underscore the urgent need for action to create a safer and more equitable working environment in the live music sector. Moreover, the report emphasises the economic disparities experienced by women in this industry, with 56% earning less than R5,000 monthly. This alarming figure reflects the broader challenges of income inequality and the undervaluation of women's contributions to the arts.

We must advocate for regulatory measures that address these inequities, including establishing fair pay scales and implementing gender quotas to ensure diverse representation across all roles in the music sector.

The recommendations put forth, including the need for gender-blind audits and reforms in education and training, serve as a roadmap for meaningful change. As we move forward, let us commit to leveraging the report recommendations as a catalyst for transformation within SAMRO and the broader music community.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all the respondents who shared their experiences and perspectives in this survey. Your voices are invaluable in driving the change we seek. I also thank the research team and our partners for their dedication and hard work in bringing this critical study to fruition.

Your voices greatly aid the change we want to see. I also want to thank the research team and our collaborators for their commitment and diligence in making this significant study possible.

Let us pledge to work together to create a fair and inclusive live music scene where all people, regardless of gender, can prosper and add to the rich fabric of our shared history.  
In solidarity

[Annabell Lebeth](#)  
CEO, SAMRO

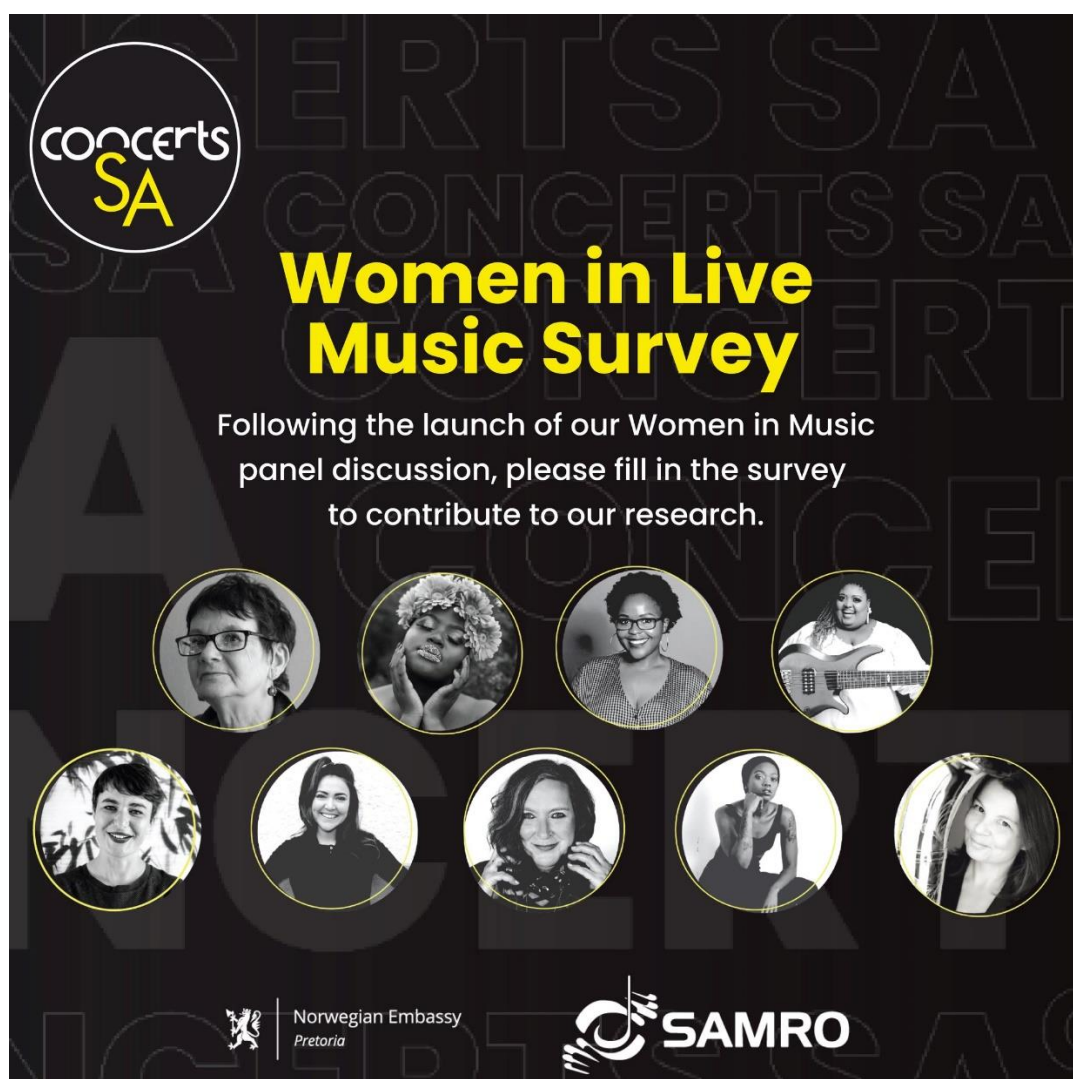
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was made possible due to the generous support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Norwegian Embassy and the Southern African Music Rights Association (SAMRO) who prioritise the importance of gender balance in the music sector.

We are grateful to the many people who responded to our survey and engaged with Concerts SA on this topic.

We are also particularly grateful to our research team leader, Gwen Ansell, who drove this project with passion and dedication, drawing on a broad knowledge base to help ensure this research considered all nuances, historical and present, to inform this research document. In addition, our thanks to the hard work of the IKS Cultural Consulting team in coordinating and assisting on the project and Mbali Ndhlovu of the *SheSaidSo* organisation for creating the visualisations.

We are also grateful to music educator, composer and bassist Concord Nkabinde for providing access to anonymised feedback data from the Ladies on Bass workshop held on 27 May 2023; qualitative comments from which reinforced several of our findings.



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## i. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ▶ Respondents

- Of the 357 respondents to the survey, 75% are women (Note: the term 'women' throughout this report refers to all persons who, regardless of their sex assigned at birth, identify as women)

### ▶ Professions

- Most respondents work full-time in live music and have been active for over ten years
- There is extreme underrepresentation of women in all technical aspects of music work
- Respondents feel stereotyped into specific gendered roles, specifically vocalism

### ▶ Income and expenditure

- 56% earn less than R5 000 a month
- Respondents report high, gender-specific work expenses, including measures to ensure personal safety especially while touring, parenting costs, and the excessive costs of maintaining an appearance that conforms to the male gaze

### ▶ Experiences

- 50+% are expected to bear responsibility for unpaid, gendered non-music duties such as organising food during rehearsals
- 60+% experience inappropriate gender-related remarks
- 68% feel unsafe travelling to/from work at late hours
- 80+% say gender is a factor in how they're treated
- 50+% say gender stereotypes limit opportunities in the live music industry, starting in education
- Producer-owned recording studios are singled out as an under-investigated site of exploitation and harassment

### ▶ Commitment

- Despite all this, respondents overwhelmingly (90%) declare confidence that they belong in their role in live music

### ▶ Demand

- Top demand from women to improve their conditions is to fix the unregulated work and pay environment in live music

This is the final report analysing the quantitative and qualitative data generated via a survey administered to 357 respondents in late 2023, supported by a comparative analysis of equivalent recent research conducted, and best practice identified by scholars and music organisations internationally.

The aim of the Concerts SA research – funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and SAMRO and conducted by IKS Cultural Consulting – was to gain insights into the lived experiences of women in the live music sector, with a focus on where and how women are represented, how equitably they are treated, and how safe they are and feel. These insights are intended to inform development and advocacy programmes that can transform the working experiences of, and opportunities for, women in live music.

Survey respondents comprised a diverse group that was three-quarters women, the majority of whom live in urban areas in Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. As with prior research projects, while respondents from all nine provinces did complete the survey, rural areas and provinces such as

the Northern Cape and Free State were largely under-represented.

Respondents were mainly over 40 years of age (60%). The survey was open to all genders; it provided multiple options to self-identify in gender terms, and those specifically “identifying as” women and non-binary persons comprised a third of all respondents. Just under a third of respondents indicated that they had formal music training in the form of a diploma or degree.

The majority of respondents work full-time in music (51.7%), spending 24 hours or more a week on activities in support of work in the live music industry, and 44.2% have been active in the sector for over 10 years. Just under 50% are self-employed, and 56% earn below R5,000 for their work in the sector. The primary role fulfilled by respondents is as singer/songwriter or singer. As with prior research projects, respondents involved in technical aspects of the sector were significantly under-represented in the sample.

The experience of women is substantially informed by their gender. Over 70% indicated that they had observed gender discrimination in the sector and over 80% reported that their gender was a factor in how they are treated. 73% reported their career progression was influenced by gender, and 63% indicated that people in the sector behaved directly and indirectly in ways that were gender-discriminatory. Unequal representation in education was highlighted by 54% of respondents, and 61% indicated that there was unequal representation in their specific working role, with 55% feeling stereotyped in that role. 53% felt their gender impacted on opportunities such as networking.

The majority of respondents, however, did not indicate they believed their own pay was determined by gender specifically, or that they personally felt unsafe because of their gender, but more than half believed it was untrue that people felt safe whatever their gender. Insights from studies around the globe may assist in understanding this apparent contradiction. International research has overwhelmingly suggested that women in music fear victimisation when speaking out about personal experiences. Despite the anonymity safeguards in place for this survey, it remains possible that some respondents preferred to express views and observations generally rather than personally.

Encouragingly, 76% reported their families supported their career choices and 90% reported that they felt a sense of belonging in their role in the live music sector. 64% indicated that their employers and/or clients did have policies and codes of conduct in place to deal with gender harassment.

When asked to rank proposed measures that would improve the lives and opportunities of women in live music, the following were ranked highest:

- ☞ Measures to recognise artistic work in live music in legislation, thus allowing for the regulation of payment and working conditions with the creation of mechanisms to enforce pay scales.
- ☞ Applying gender quotas to ensure gender representivity and support for a diversity of roles in music work and projects.
- ☞ Gender-blind auditions.
- ☞ Gender quotas in education and training for both educators and students across all roles in the music sector.

## ii. GLOSSARY OF TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>Concerts SA</b>	[South African] project supporting the live music sector, including a mobility fund supporting musicians and music venues
<b>Copenza</b>	A network of music promoters and festivals in southern Africa
<b>IKS</b>	Indigenous Knowledge Systems - cultural consultancy
<b>KUMISA</b>	KwaZulu-Natal United Music Industry Association
<b>KZN</b>	[South African Province of] KwaZulu-Natal
<b>MIA</b>	Music in Africa Foundation research and networking NPO, and information portal
<b>POPIA</b>	[South African] Protection of Personal Information Act
<b>R</b>	South African Rand [currency]
<b>SACO</b>	South African Cultural Observatory
<b>SAMRO</b>	Southern African Music Rights Organisation
<b>Statistics SA</b>	South African national statistics agency
<b>SLA</b>	Service Level Agreement
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>TUMSA</b>	Trade Union for Musicians of South Africa
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>Women</b>	All persons who, regardless of their sex assigned at birth, identify as women





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Above: Nicky Blumenfeld, Monthati Masebe, Titi Luzipo and Aus Tebza contributes to the Concerts SA panel discussion - *How do we advance equity, representation and safety for women in the music sector?* (August 2023)



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the final report on a study initiated by the Concerts SA project into the experiences of women in the live music industry in South Africa. The data presented is both quantitative and qualitative and represents the outcomes of a survey administered in late 2023, inviting people working in live music to contribute their knowledge, observations and experiences of working conditions and workplace interactions in the live music industry.

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of the study is to contribute to industry and societal understanding of how women are treated in the live music sector, with a view to developing a set of recommendations for policy and industry stakeholders. A secondary purpose is to contribute to the body of research about the South African live music sector, and to begin to fill gaps relating to the understanding of women's lived experiences in live music in SA.

### 1.2. Methodological notes

#### 1.2.1 Developing the survey instrument

The survey was developed based on the findings of the SAMRO 2022 report<sup>1</sup>, communication with role-players in the field of gender in music (including collaborating partner, the *SheSaidSo* women in music organisation), and the transcribed contributions of panellists and audience members at the IKS/SAMRO/Concerts SA, 4th August 2023 Women in Music launch event.

The themes emerging from these sources were converted into question areas: demographic and business mapping; representation; equity; safety; and options for change. The questions were then further refined through research team discussion, and to fit the technical formatting requirements of Survey Monkey. The survey was piloted by research team members and their contacts before going public.

The survey took the form of direct, closed questions to provide demographic and economic activity information, plus sets of Likert items (statements with which a survey respondent is required to indicate degrees of agreement/disagreement) for representivity, equity and safety, and a set of items to be ranked/augmented for options for change. The survey was administered online.

Several of the Likert items were deliberately "doubled-up", offering similar statements both as observations and as experiences. This had a dual purpose: first, to allow male-identifying respondents to report what they had seen but not necessarily experienced; second, to allow female-identifying respondents to offer a more impersonal observation where they might find it distressing to allude to a direct personal experience.

Particularly where items referred to issues of sexual harassment, bullying or pressure, the percentages indicating observation or perception were higher than those indicating direct personal experience. A more sensitive research process - allowing more time, confidential face-to-face interactions and counselling support - would be valuable in understanding to what extent "observing" in this context codes "experiencing". Sadly, data from other research suggests this phenomenon may occur frequently.

A number of open items were also included to strengthen the qualitative component of the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> South African Music Rights Organisation (SAMRO) 2022 *Women's Rights and Representation in the South African Music Sector: final report*

### 1.2.2 Survey timeframe

The research was initiated at a Women's Month panel discussion, *How do we advance representation, equity and safety for women in the music sector?*, held on 4 August 2023. The survey was launched on 29 November 2023 with an initial closing date of 14 December 2023, and a target of a minimum of 300 responses. It was shared by Music in Africa on 5 December 2023, and on 13 December 2023, the deadline was extended until 24 December 2023. At that final closing date, 362 responses had been received, with 357 granting permission to use their data.

### 1.2.3 Identifying the survey population

Mapping the presence of women in South African live music is handicapped by significant gaps in the SA music information landscape. No directory of South African music has existed since 2010; no single organisation fully represents performers in the music industry; non-performing cohorts are even more scantily organised and documented, and research bodies such as the South African Cultural Observatory merge music workers in their databases with many other kinds of professionals in a much more extensive, UNESCO-defined category.

To develop a more comprehensive reach, the researchers therefore employed a value-chain framework and drew on the contact databases of the following organisations to publicise the survey and reach as many links in the live music value-chain as possible, including media and/or cross-postings by the following organisations:

- ☞ Concerts SA social media channels and newsletters
- ☞ SAMRO social media channels
- ☞ Music in Africa online article
- ☞ The SheSaidSo database cross-postings
- ☞ The South African Cultural Observatory cross-postings
- ☞ The National Arts Festival cross-postings
- ☞ Copenza cross-postings
- ☞ Moshito cross-postings
- ☞ National Arts Council cross-postings
- ☞ TUMSA cross-postings
- ☞ KUMISA cross-postings
- ☞ Music Exchange cross-postings

4832 people read the newsletter from IKS and Concerts SA, and knowledge of the survey reached 10 526 people on Facebook.

### 1.2.4 Processing the data

The quantitative data mapping women in South African live music were analysed using tools from web-based survey portal Survey Monkey and presented as an interim report.

Qualitative analysis of the 196 responses received to open-ended items was subsequently undertaken to add to this final version. The data were manually coded: first, inductively to develop codes from participant's experiences and then by grouping those codes to construct broader thematic categories. Qualitative responses often dealt with issues relating to multiple survey items in the course of a single comment, so responses were coded thematically across, not within, questions. Based on this, representative quotes from respondents were selected to illustrate the text, and Wordclouds of thematic clusters created. A parallel process of desk research considered extant local (of which there is very little) and international scholarship as well as research undertaken by international industry organisations. International research is extensive: initial searches identified over three decades of both scholarly and stakeholder work.

Many contextual changes have occurred in the music industry over the past 30 years, including the ascendancy of live rather than recorded product to the top of the value-chain, and the increasing prominence of (particularly digital) technology in making music. Most of the industry-generated studies for this report were deliberately selected from the past five years to ensure these changes and their impacts were represented. Sifting international research highlighted points of concurrence with, and divergence from, our findings.

The most noticeable divergence with international scholarship is in context rather than content. A largely freelance, project-based industry such as live music is something of a regulatory “Wild West” everywhere in the world. South Africa has progressive legal and policy stances on gender, prejudice and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) that surpass those of some other countries. But creative work in this country has markedly more limited regulatory and legislative provisions from which to develop mechanisms for supporting and advancing women in the industry.

### **1.2.5 Ethical safeguards**

All respondents were informed of the uses to which survey data would be put, were given a contact link to investigate further, and had to explicitly opt in (as required by POPIA) before the online survey instrument permitted them to proceed.

All data was provided and is cited anonymously. In the event that respondents unwittingly provided information that could lead to identification, this has been redacted.

Because of the potentially triggering nature of some questions, the survey directed respondents to the resources of the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) for further support.

## **1.3 Methodological limitations**

The constrained timeframe limited the time available for piloting. While organisational budget cycles often make such timeframes unavoidable, it is recommended that this be considered when timeframes and reporting dates for similar future research projects are set.

Additionally, having access to only limited survey population information (see Point 1.2.3 above) made it undesirable to “use up” potential respondents in a more wide-ranging advance piloting exercise. We concede that some segments and thus types of responses may be un- or under-represented for this reason alone. Improved music industry databases are required to solve this problem and this is discussed in the final chapter.

Finally – if unsurprisingly, particularly in a survey dealing with matters such as sexual harassment and abuse that many respondents will find sensitive or triggering – not all respondents answered all questions. The number of responses – “N” – is indicated for each item. While the structure of the survey means this does not detract from the value of data from individual questions, it does slightly constrain the options for extrapolation. Where this may have impacted on analytical conclusions is noted in the text.

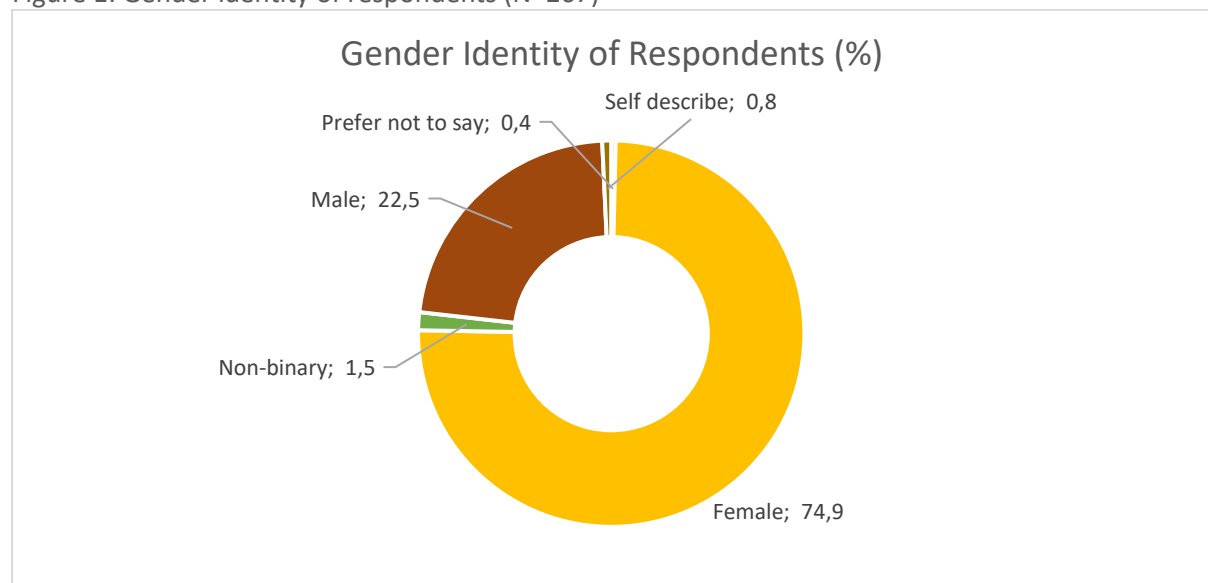
## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: WOMEN IN LIVE MUSIC (2023)

(NOTE: in the narrative account of these data, all percentages have been rounded: up, if above X.5%; down, if below that, with X.5% left intact. Rounding to a single decimal place means some totals may exceed 100%.)

### 2.1 Gender identity

As outlined in the figure below, 75% of respondents to the survey identify as women, and 22% as men. A very small number of respondents identified as non-binary or preferred not to disclose their gender; this is consonant with the identifications noted in international research. While noting the methodological limitations outlined above, and given the high proportion of respondents identifying as women, the survey is able to comment with some authority on the lived experiences of women in live music.

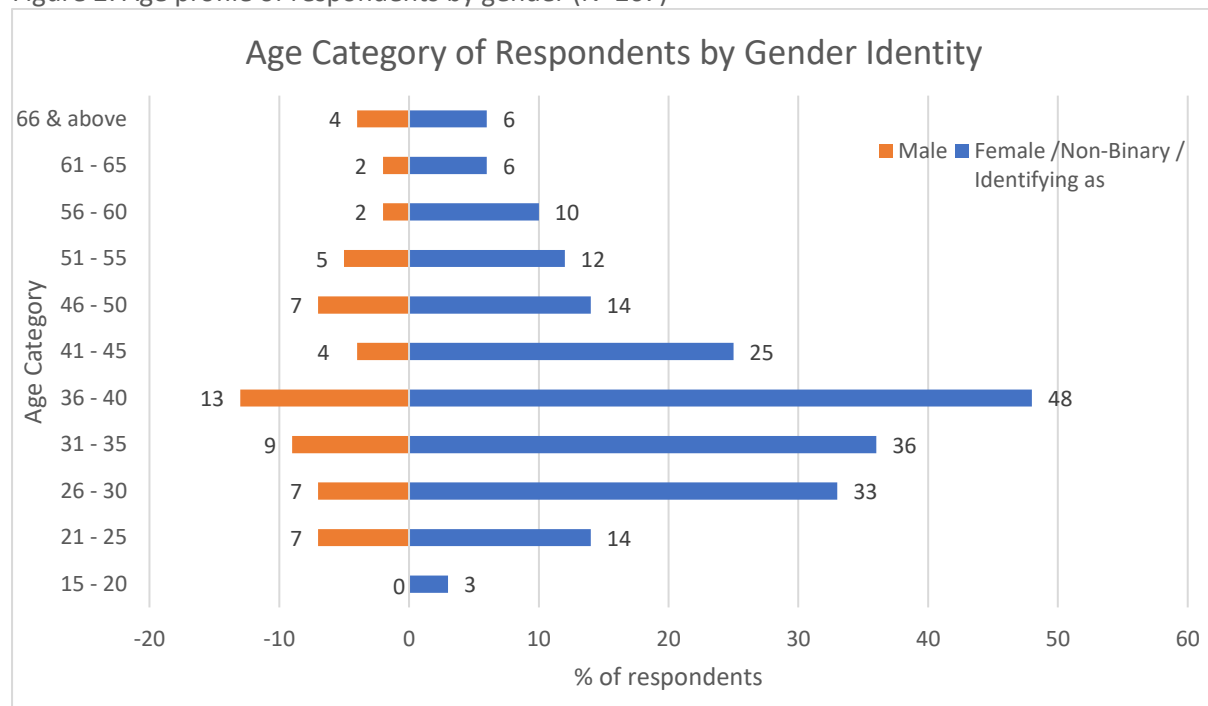
Figure 1: Gender identity of respondents (N=267)



### 2.2 Age profile of respondents

Across all respondents, the majority (60%) were above the age of 36 and 40% were young people. As such, the survey does represent the views of both older and younger artists working in live music in South Africa. In the category of women and of respondents identifying as non-binary, a significant number of respondents (117: representing about a third of all respondents) were aged between 26 and 40 years of age.

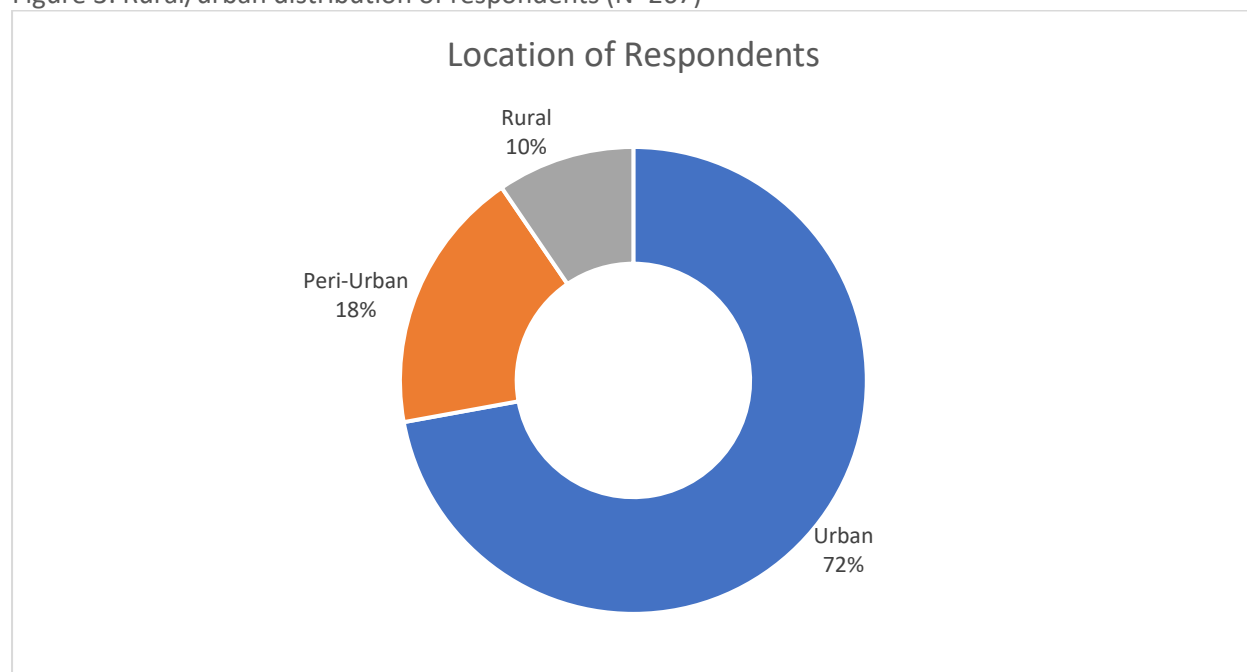
Figure 2: Age profile of respondents by gender (N=267)



### 2.3 Location and province

As with prior studies, many respondents were based in urban areas, with 72% living in large cities and 18% living in smaller cities. Only 10% of respondents lived in rural areas. This was not an area investigated by international research, but for South Africa, it matters because it reflects a persistent urban/rural imbalance, even in areas of cultural activity such as music, where we know many sources of inspiration are rooted in rural legacies.

Figure 3: Rural/urban distribution of respondents (N=267)



Consistent with mapping studies conducted by the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) over a number of years, which document geographic agglomerations in the cultural and creative industries, the majority of respondents live in Gauteng (45%), the Western Cape (21%) and KwaZulu-Natal (16%). While survey responses were received from all provinces, only 0.4% were from the Northern Cape, 2% from Limpopo, 3% from the Free State, 4% from the North West province, and 4% from the Eastern Cape.

Table 1: Provincial distribution of respondents (N=267)

Province	No of respondents	% of sample
Eastern Cape	11	4.1
Free State	8	3.0
Gauteng	120	44.9
KwaZulu-Natal	43	16.1
Limpopo	7	2.6
Mpumalanga	9	3.4
North West	11	4.1
Northern Cape	1	0.4
Western Cape	57	21.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.0</b>

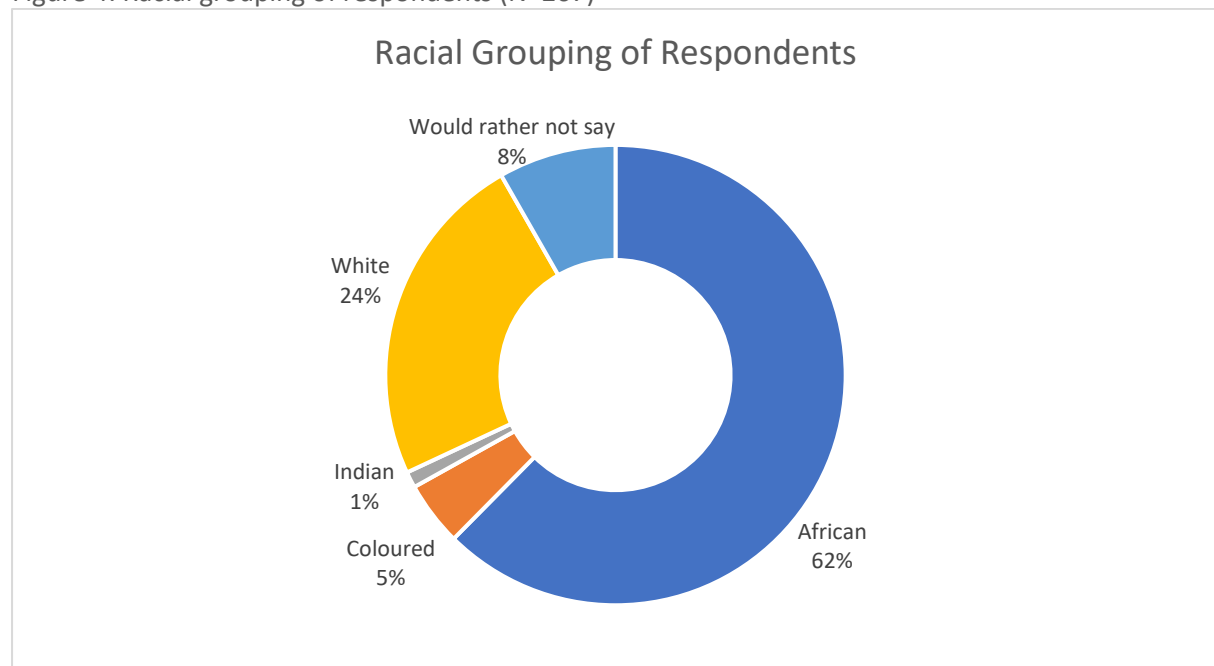
## 2.4 Racial grouping

When asked about racial category, 62% of respondents indicated that they are African, 24% White, 5% Coloured and 1% Indian. 8% of respondents indicated that they preferred not to disclose.

In the qualitative responses - from what appeared to be the same respondent explicitly, and in answer to several different items - the issue of the extreme underrepresentation of women of Indian heritage in live music and on recordings played by broadcasters was raised; this underrepresentation is also visible in the percentages below. Further research could illuminate whether this signifies an absence of female musicians of Indian heritage, or is indicative of a specific community of musicians somehow inadequately networked into the broader professional landscape and thus unaware of surveys or professional opportunities.

Collecting data that includes these racial categories is consistent with national statistical practice, and permits cross-comparison with national datasets, allowing for the development of a body of knowledge reflecting how racial divides, together with gender, continue to have a major impact on success and opportunity in South Africa. However, we acknowledge that the continued use of these labels, which were instruments of privilege and repression under apartheid and have no scientific basis, remains controversial. It is unsurprising that 8% of our respondents chose not to use them.

Figure 4: Racial grouping of respondents (N=267)



## 2.5 Education and training

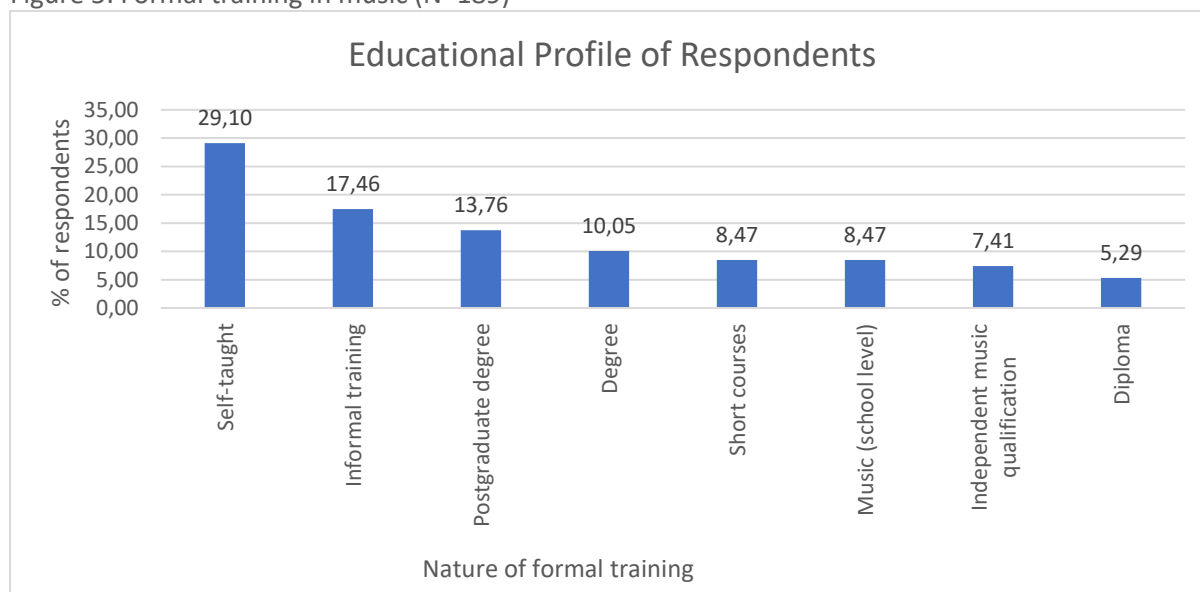
Just under 30% of respondents indicated that they were self-taught and 17.5% reported having accessed informal training. Consistent with mapping data collected by SACO, just under a third (29%) of respondents indicated that they had tertiary qualifications in the form of a diploma, degree or postgraduate qualification. A small proportion (8.5%) reported having music education at school level; only 7% reported having an independent music qualification.

The significant proportion of respondents acknowledging informal training is an indicator of the important role that community music teaching and learning still plays in South Africa. In this context, it underlines the importance of extending measures designed to enhance gender equity to all places where music learning happens, and not limiting them to formal institutions alone.

Additionally, educational experiences and opportunities, while outside the brief of this targeted live music research, is clearly crucial to women's presence in all types of music careers. In Chapter Six below, the proposal for future longitudinal studies of female music career progression directly addresses this "missing link".



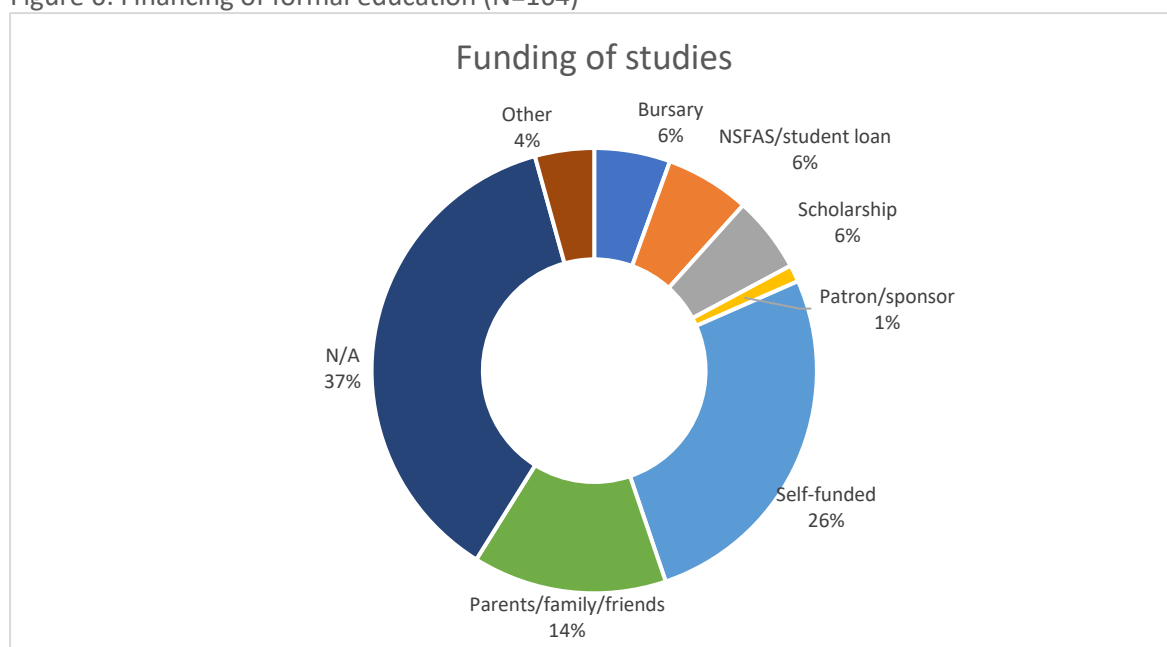
Figure 5: Formal training in music (N=189)



Formal education, as outlined in the figure below, was largely self-funded (26%), with 14% indicating that friends and family had assisted in financing their studies. A very small percentage (6%) reported receiving formal assistance in the form of unspecified bursaries; another 6% from the financial aid of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and 6% from unspecified scholarships.

Given the prevalence of self-funding and the importance of informal education for women in music, further research would be merited on the ways in which this funding support landscape resembles or diverges from that of, for example, STEM subjects - the reasons for this and its economic impact.

Figure 6: Financing of formal education (N=164)



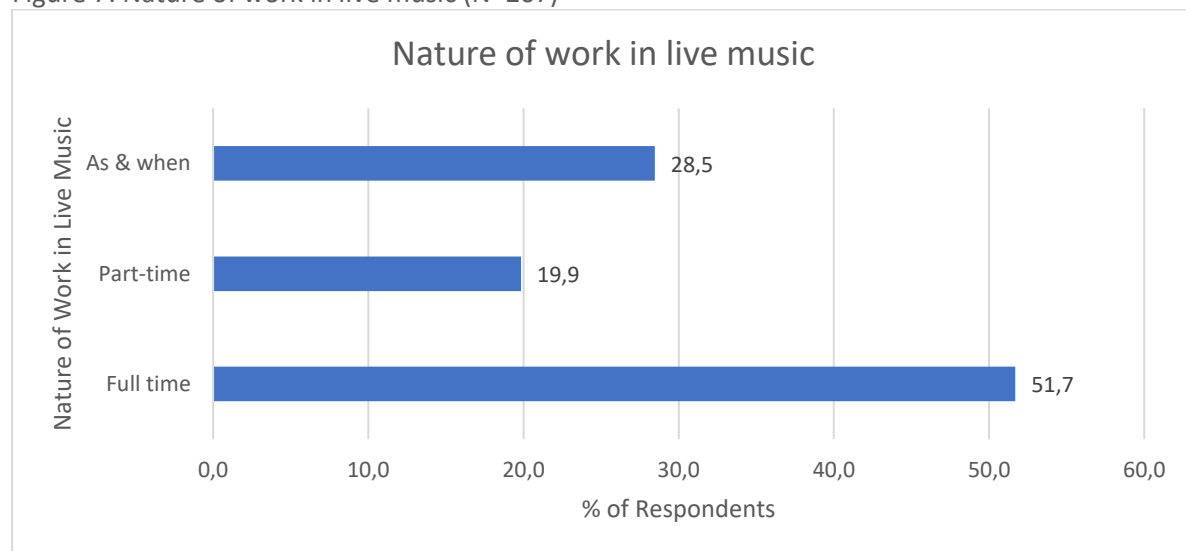
### 3. WORKING IN LIVE MUSIC

#### 3.1 The nature of live music work

Just over 50% of respondents reported that they work as full-time professionals in the live music industry; 29% work “as and when” gigs and opportunities arise; and 20% describe themselves as working part-time. This is consistent with international research: music is predominantly in its nature a freelance, project-led activity, i.e. “work”, rather than “a job”. Further, as various UNESCO reports have foregrounded, this is not a defect in the structure of the industry but rather one source of its powerful capacity for agile creative innovation: a feature, not a bug, but in a positive sense.

However, this has important implications for policy-makers considering forms of financial support, relief or subsidy for live music, and suggests – as does much other industry research – that insistence on the types of documentation and bureaucratic process applicable in formal employment contexts may not be the most effective approach.

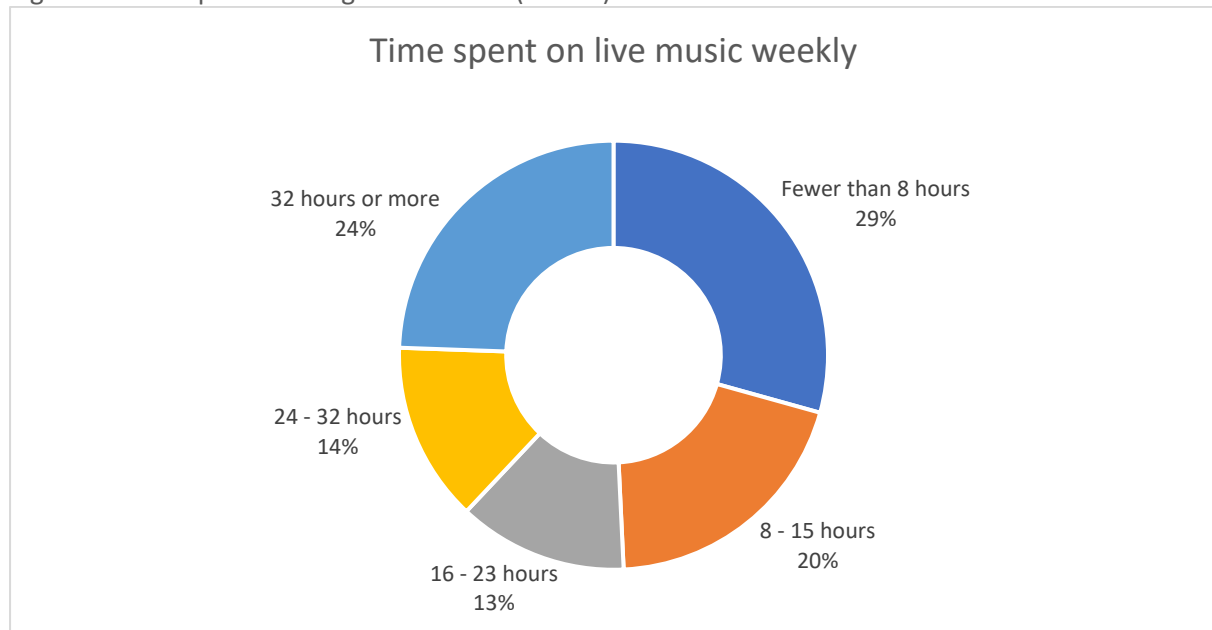
Figure 7: Nature of work in live music (N=267)



Consistent with the nature of their involvement reported above, the majority of respondents (38%) spend 24 hours or more a week working in the live music sector. A significant number of respondents (29%) reported working fewer than 8 hours per week, and 33% reported working between 8 and 23 hours per week.

The focus of this research was not a granular analysis of “time spent working”. Nevertheless, it is worth noting there may be significant variations among respondents in whether they did or did not count the essential unpaid hours spent on practice, rehearsal and related activities.

Figure 8: Time spent working in live music (N=267)



### 3.2 Primary and secondary roles

When asked about their primary and secondary roles in live music, the largest proportion of respondents indicated that they fulfilled singer/songwriter or singer roles. This is consistent with earlier studies which indicate, albeit on small sample sizes, that women continue to occupy roles primarily and secondarily as vocalists and songwriters. A fairly large number reported backing vocalist, producer, composer and bandleader as secondary occupations.

Significantly, a very small percentage (1%) reported being involved in technical aspects of live music, and a small number (under 3%) reported primary leadership roles as bandleaders or music directors. All of this is wholly consonant with the findings of international research: women performers are often “boxed in” to gendered roles as vocalists, and excluded from technical and leadership roles and the training and mentorship opportunities which open doors to them. Some international studies have noted that music education and support roles, such as music public relations, also serve as gendered alternatives to women being on stage, behind the decks, or behind the sound desk. In those qualitative responses alluding to the need for improved women's training across all survey items, more than a dozen specifically mentioned “technical” or “engineering”.

*“Women are usually seen as good for the visual and aesthetic aspects instead of technical parts.”*

*“I can name many women composers – known and unknown – but not many producers, engineers and executives.”*

The qualitative responses supported this finding of the underrepresentation of women in technical roles. They also made it clear that when women are able to assume a more autonomous role in their music work (through experience or industry status), this provides greater power to combat discrimination. A number of responses mentioned eliminating certain indignities through setting one's own terms of employment.

*“I usually include a childcare fee embedded in my performance fee so that I can pay a babysitter if I need to.”*

*"Because I don't have kids and work for myself, I can create the work environment I require."*

*"As a long-time professional... [many items here]... no longer happen to me, but they certainly did when I was younger."*

*"I set up my own SLAs so I set the terms of employment. I try my best to make sure clear safety boundaries are set and act accordingly should they be violated."*

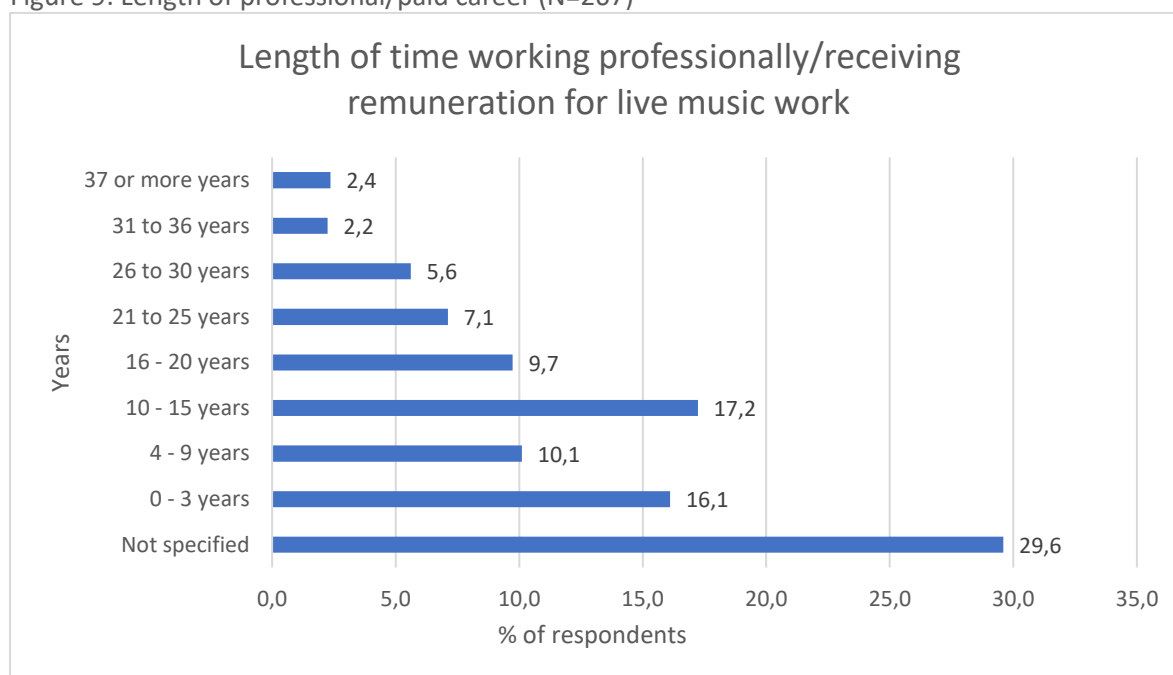
*"Men who demand better treatment/riders/assistance/timeslot changes etc are not viewed as 'difficult (...)' whereas women who demand these things are 'hard to work with'."*

Table 2: Roles in music – primary and secondary (N=267)

<b>Roles in music</b>	<b>Primary %</b>	<b>Secondary %</b>
Singer/songwriter	34.2	9.2
Singer	13.2	5.4
Instrumentalist	12.8	5.8
Music business professional (publisher, lawyer, funder, label executive)	6.4	6.9
Other	6.4	6.2
Producer	4.1	6.9
Educator (at a school, college or university)	3.8	4.2
Promoter/publicist	3.4	5.4
Composer	2.6	10.4
Bandleader	2.3	7.3
Musical Director	1.9	2.3
Music Researcher/Consultant	1.9	4.2
Venue owner	1.5	0.8
Music journalist/blogger/podcaster	1.5	0.8
Music technology and logistics worker (sound engineer, backstage, roadie)	1.1	1.5
Music teacher (independent of any institution)	1.1	3.9
Music rights administrator	0.8	1.2
Backing vocalist	0.4	5.8
Arranger	0.4	2.3
DJ	0.4	3.1
Not applicable	-	6.5

A significant number of respondents (30%) did not specify how long they had worked in live music at the time of survey. However, the majority of respondents (26%) reported that they had worked between 0 and 9 years in live music, and 17% reported working for between 10 and 15 years. A significant percentage (27%) of respondents classify as industry “veterans”, having worked for over 16 years in the industry.

Figure 9: Length of professional/paid career (N=267)



In terms of their business profile, the largest single cohort of respondents (48%) are self-employed music workers, with 16% owners of music-related businesses. 8% are music educators and 2% are private music teachers working full or part-time. 10% of respondents work part-time in the live music sector. As with all freelance workers, the precarity of their employment situation makes music workers more vulnerable than those formally employed to pressure, bullying and exploitation.

Table 3: Role in live music sector (N=191)

Role	%
Self-employed music worker	47.6
Owner	15.7
Part-time music worker	10.0
Full or part-time music educator	7.9
Working for a non-profit	6.8
Full-time employee of a music business	5.2
Volunteer	4.7
Full or part-time music teacher (private)	1.6
Investor	0.5

The primary income source for the largest segment of respondents (31%) at the time of the survey was fees for performance or technical work. This was followed by 26% who reported ticket sales as their primary revenue stream. 11% reported salaries from full-time employment as their primary income, and 8% reported that grant funding provided their main income. Only a small percentage (6%) reported that royalties were their primary source of income.

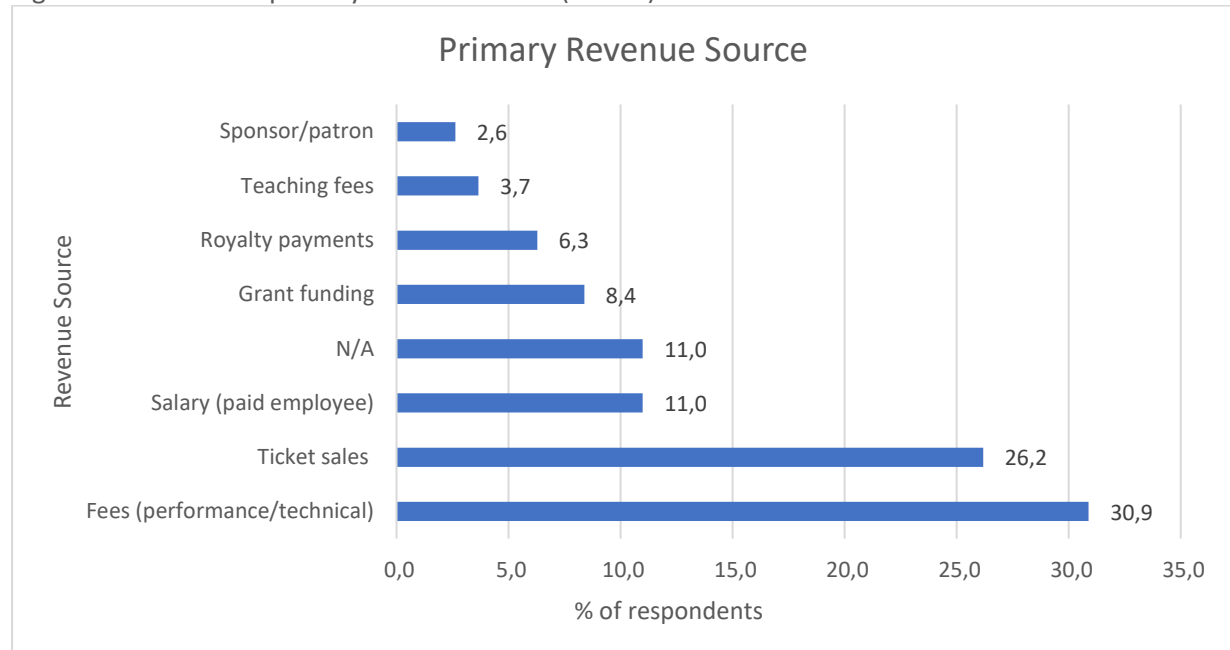
This last figure reinforces the limited representation of women in formally acknowledged roles as composers. In the 4 August 2023 panel debate that initiated this research, however, female vocalists in the audience indicated that they were frequently called on to compose parts to add to a producer's studio mix without credit or remuneration for such work: another instance of the exploitation rife in

a largely unregulated sector, and of the importance of recording studios as a site of women's music experiences.

*"In my personal experience the harassment takes place in private spaces such as recording studios, which are always owned by white, straight-identifying males."*

*"I can only confidently name [women composers, etc] because I am one of them. We have to actively (...) hold space for each other when men don't want to. We know each other because we are the only ones saying our names in the rooms and at boardroom meetings where the male to female boardroom representation is putrid."*

Figure 10: Revenue – primary revenue source (N=191)



Asked about their composition activities, 146 respondents indicated that they are composers, and 70% of those (102 respondents) indicated that they have registered their work with a copyright collection agency; the missing 30% indicates the need for more information and outreach on the part of collection societies.

28% of respondents did not specify whether or not they were owners of music-related businesses or bandleaders. Of the others, 58% indicated that they are business owners/managers – which the survey defined as including leading a band – with 24% indicating that they were not.

The median number of employees reported by enterprise owners or bandleaders was 5. However, this should be seen as the provision of work rather than jobs, because respondents reported that the majority of their employees are freelance (83%), with the median number of freelance employees also 5.

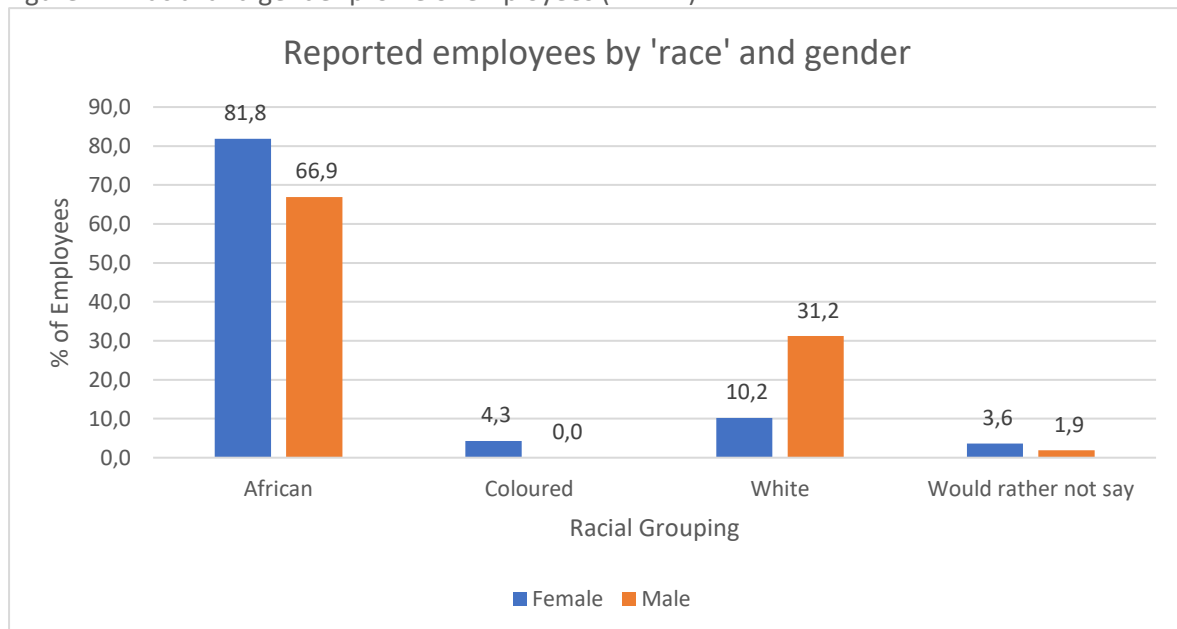
Only 10% of employees were reported as having full-time engagements and 7% as having part-time engagements. For those respondents reporting full-time employees, the average number of employees was 11 and the median number 5. For those reporting part-time employees, the median number of employees was 6.

The majority of employees were reported as African (76%) and White (17.5%). In terms of gender, men represent 35% of all employees and women 65%, with 0.4% of employees categorised by the employer as preferring not to disclose their gender. Of all female employees, as indicated in the figure

below, 82% were reported as African and 10% White. Of all male employees, 67% were reported as African and 31% White. Female employees reported as Coloured represent just above 4% of all women employees.

*"I am at varsity and not doing music permanently [because] there's no opportunities for Indian women in music in SA. There's only opportunities for white and black women."*

Figure 11: Racial and gender profile of employees (N=127)



Respondents work in a wide variety of musical genres. Asked to identify their main genre of work, the biggest single segment (19%) report themselves as working primarily in jazz, followed by multiple genres (7%), classical music (6%) and gospel (6%). As is the case worldwide, few commonly agreed genre definitions exist in music: it is a volatile, highly fragmented landscape where genre definitions and identifications may also depend on marketing considerations and fashion trends. All other genre identifications taken together (79%) significantly outweigh the jazz cohort.

Although one respondent wondered whether the gender situation might be different “depending on what kind of genre in which one is engaging”, instances of gender-related barriers and worse were reported across multiple genres in the qualitative responses. For example:

*"The jazz circuit is to a large extent still male-dominated. There are instruments that are considered masculine (...) and feminine (...). During collaborations, women are often chosen for vocalist roles unless there are required gender quotas that need to be adhered to, which forces the bands to find female musicians."*

*"I was told by some of my band members that because I am a woman that means I am weak when it comes to rap."*

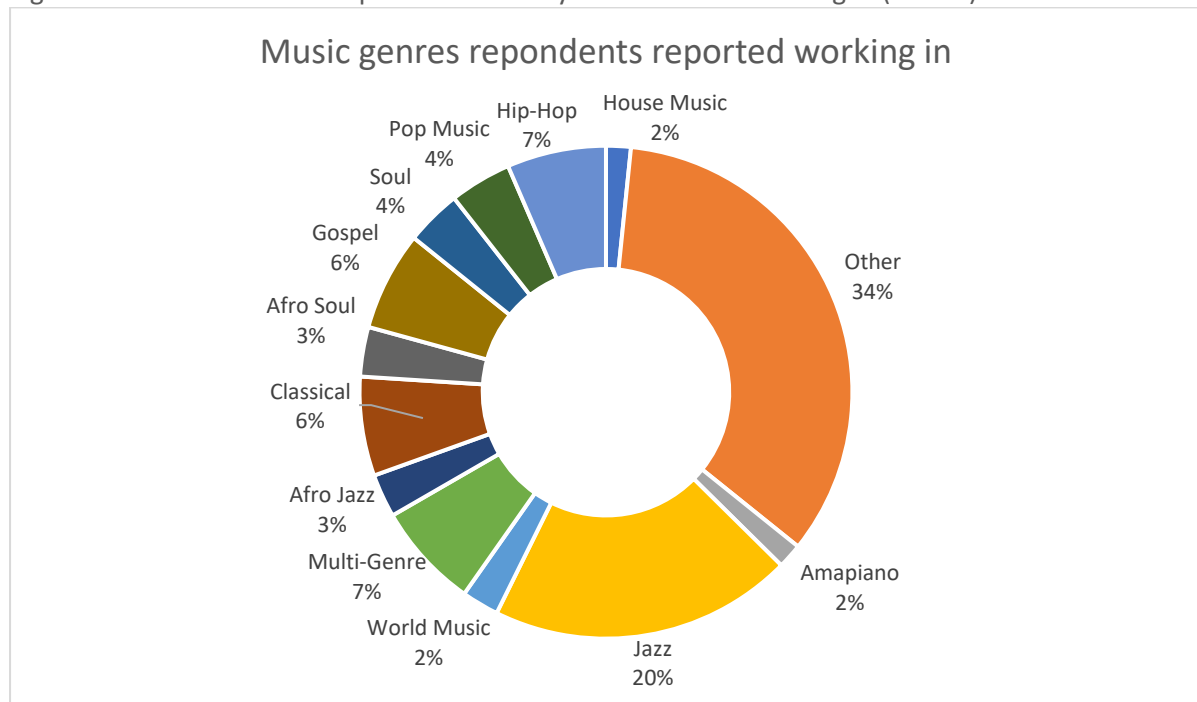


*"It's something simple, but as a classical musician I am expected to wear black for all performances. As a woman, I am expected to wear different black outfits if I have consecutive performances, while my male colleagues wear the same black suits for all."*

*"When it comes to the hip hop world, it seems like exchanging sexual favours for a chance at making it is normal – and unfair."*

*"I had to walk away from the business because I refused sexual favours."*

Figure 12: Genre of music respondents identify themselves as working in (N=191)



The category of "other", representing 33% of all responses was comprised of one or two respondents working in a range of genres and sub-genres including: Adult contemporary and Contemporary, Adult jazz, Afrikaans pop, Afro pop, Afro-folk, Alternative, Cinematic, Folk-rock, Experimental jazz and Dance

### 3.3 Income generated from work in live music

A wide range of average monthly incomes were reported by respondents. Of concern is that 56% earn below R5,000 per month for their work in live music, with a quarter of respondents earning under R1,000 per month. A substantial number of respondents (19%) reported earning between R5,000 and R12,000 each month, and 19% reported earning between R12,000 and R30,000 rand per month. Data on perceptions of equity reported at 4.4 below suggest a widespread observation that gender impacts income, and that women are paid less for comparable work while bearing additional expenses because of their gender.

### Average monthly income category

A donut chart illustrating the distribution of average monthly income categories. The chart is divided into seven segments of varying sizes and colors, each labeled with its corresponding income range and percentage. The segments are: R0 - R1,000 (25%, blue), R1,001 - R,5000 (31%, orange), R5,001 - R11,999 (19%, grey), R12,000 - R15,000 (7%, yellow), R15,001 - R20,000 (5%, light blue), R21,000-R30,000 (7%, green), and R35,000 - R40,000 (2%, dark blue). A small brown segment represents R40,001 and over (4%).

Income Category	Percentage
R0 - R1,000	25%
R1,001 - R,5000	31%
R5,001 - R11,999	19%
R12,000 - R15,000	7%
R15,001 - R20,000	5%
R21,000-R30,000	7%
R35,000 - R40,000	2%
R40,001 and over	4%

The survey items that informed this aspect of the research were largely derived from analysis of the inputs made by women (panellists and audience members) at a panel discussion held by Concerts SA and SAMRO on 4 August 2023, as well as a brief preliminary scan of comparable research from elsewhere. The panel yielded wide-ranging inputs on gender perceptions, work experiences, working conditions and safety issues for women in the South African live music industry.



#### 4.1 Additional expenses for women in the live music workplace

113 respondents answered questions pertaining to gender-related expenses in the live music industry. A majority, 64%, reported that there are specific expenses unique to women in the sector. These include:

- ☞ Childcare costs.
- ☞ Personal safety devices such as pepper spray.
- ☞ Styling, hair, cosmetics and attire/costumes (and with regard to those last, the need to have access to multiple outfits or continually alter outfits).
- ☞ Safe public transport (specifically, ride-share services).
- ☞ Private and safe accommodation.

This item – sometimes referred to (by what is itself a stereotyping label) as the “pink tax” – attracted the largest number of qualitative responses. In order of frequency of mentions, expenses associated with personal presentation such as attire and makeup received the most mentions; expenses related to personal safety, privacy and transport (often, the formulation was “safe transport”) an almost equal second, with childcare costs a close third. These gendered costs of unpaid domestic labour and additional safeguarding are psychological as well as financial. As the selection of comments below indicate: women must constantly bear these issues in mind as well as spend money on them.

*“As a mother, I need to order food for my daughter when I can't be home due to work.”*

*“...makeup, hair and outfits which cost more than you are paid.”*

*“...Uber so no late night walking to cars parked far away from venues; makeup/wardrobe as pressures to look a certain way affect women more than men.”*

*“Extra room charges (to not share a room with all-male casts/bands)...”*

*“I find that a lot of the male instrumentalists I know have children. However, they either don't live with them or they have a female support structure in the form of either the mother of the child, grandparents etc...”*

#### 4.2 Perceptions of gender in live music

Respondents were asked to indicate their degrees of agreement or disagreement with a variety of statements about what they had observed in live music work environments. In such questions, which may touch on sensitive matters, a simple report of agreement or disagreement only tells half the story, because the percentage of converse views may still be significant.

The largest groups of respondents **agreed** or **agreed strongly** with the following statements:

- ☞ Gender is a factor in how people in live music treat one another (81%).
- ☞ Gender influences career progression in live music (73%).
- ☞ I have observed gender discrimination in or around live music (73%).
- ☞ People in live music behave in ways that contain indirect, subtle or unintentional gender discrimination (64%).
- ☞ I have seen gender-related harassment or violence around live music (52%).
- ☞ Music workers speak in ways that exclude or insult on grounds of gender (44%).

Two items related to the issue of gender stereotyping and gender-related role “boxes”. While 58% agreed that

- “Masculine” and “feminine” styles of performing and composing certainly exist, only 44% agreed that
- It is natural for different genders to take different roles in music (44%).

On this latter item, a majority (56%) disagreed or expressed neutrality.

The largest groups of respondents **disagreed** with the following statements:

- Pay for all kinds of live music work is the same whatever your gender (50%).
- People feel safe working in live music whatever their gender (54%).

A majority thus characterised live music as a gender-unsafe and financially inequitable environment, consonant with the views of participants at the live workshop, and with the findings of international research.

Respondents were almost equally **divided** on whether:

- Backstage facilities are equally good for all genders

This was clarified by open comments, many of which pointed out that backstage facilities were more appropriately characterised as equally bad for all genders. This points forward to the need expressed by survey respondents for labour law and working conditions inspection and regulation to be extended to freelance music work.

*"It really depends on the venue or type of event. I have changed in a 'portaloo' before. If it really is an issue I find many venues have a 'wheelchair' bathroom that is more private and I am able to go there..."*

*"Backstage areas are often unsafe and ill-equipped to offer female musicians the kind of safety and privacy required to focus, rest and change outfits..."*

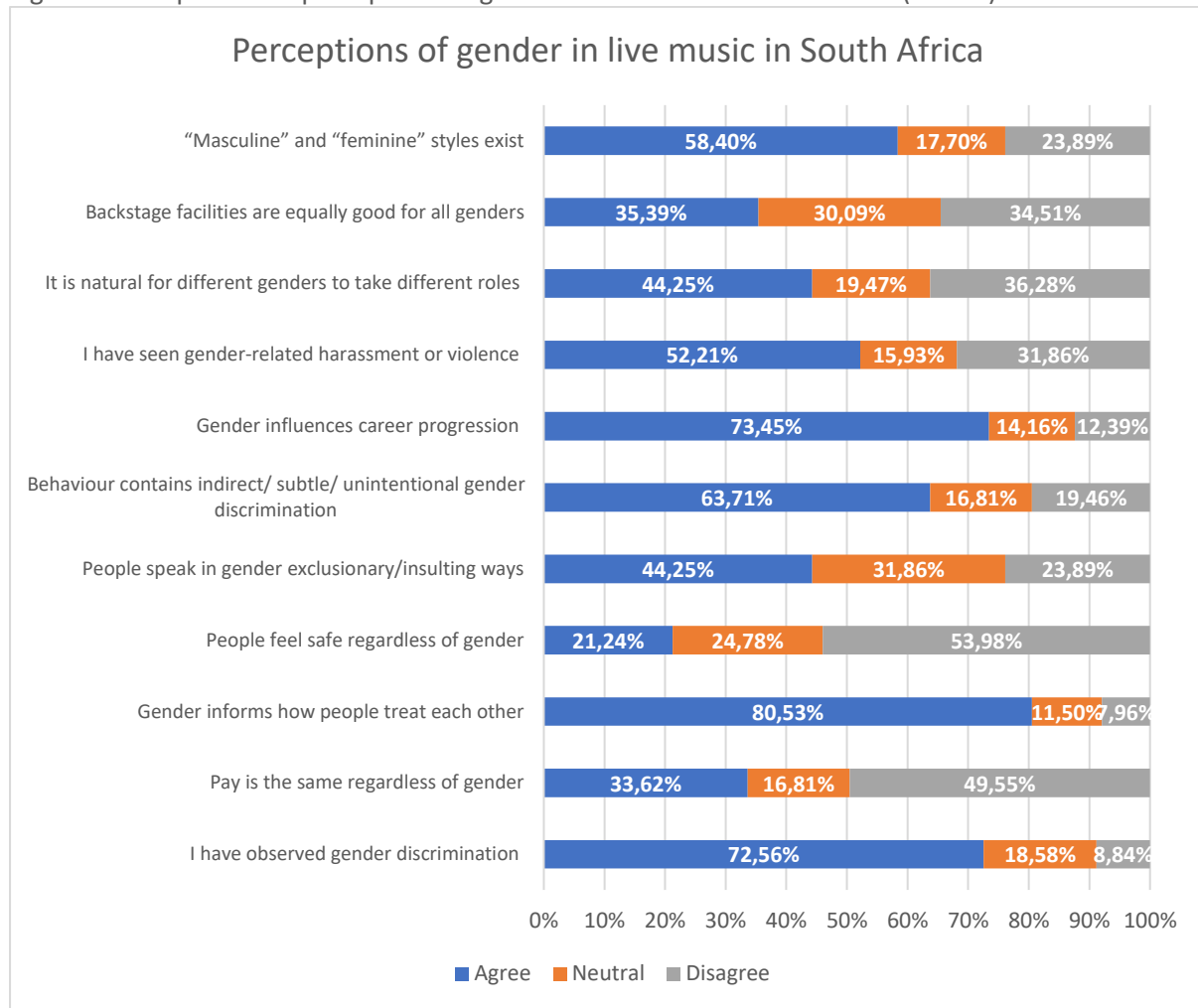
*"All backstage areas in SA are sub-par..."*

*"The world of live music is an unregulated space, there are no SOPs [standard operating procedures] (...) there's simply no normal..."*

*"...more times than not there are no gender-specific change rooms and we all have to share."*

*"In terms of the facilities to perform, we all get the same environment..."*

Figure 14: Respondents' perceptions of gender in live music in South Africa (N=113)



### 4.3 Representation of women in live music

Again, these items requested respondents to indicate degrees of agreement or disagreement. In such questions, which may touch on sensitive matters, a simple report of agreement or disagreement only tells part of the story, because the proportion of converse views may still be significant.

When asked about representations of women in live music, the largest groups of respondents **agreed** with the following statements:

- I am confident I belong in my role in music irrespective of my gender (90%).  
This is a far stronger expression of self-confidence than any found in international studies, and one of the most encouraging findings of the study. Despite the tough intersectional battles South African women encounter, they believe in and proudly assert their right to occupy the music space.
- My family supports my choice of a life in music irrespective of my gender (77%).
- I have always been in a gender minority in my music-related activities (52%).
- I see diverse images of women in music in the media: including in magazines, papers and TV drama series (42%).

In this final item, however, the largest single cohort of responses (agreement) is outweighed by aggregated neutral and disagree responses (58%). Add to this the 40% who rarely saw their own role in live music represented in the news and it becomes clear that the role played in shaping perceptions

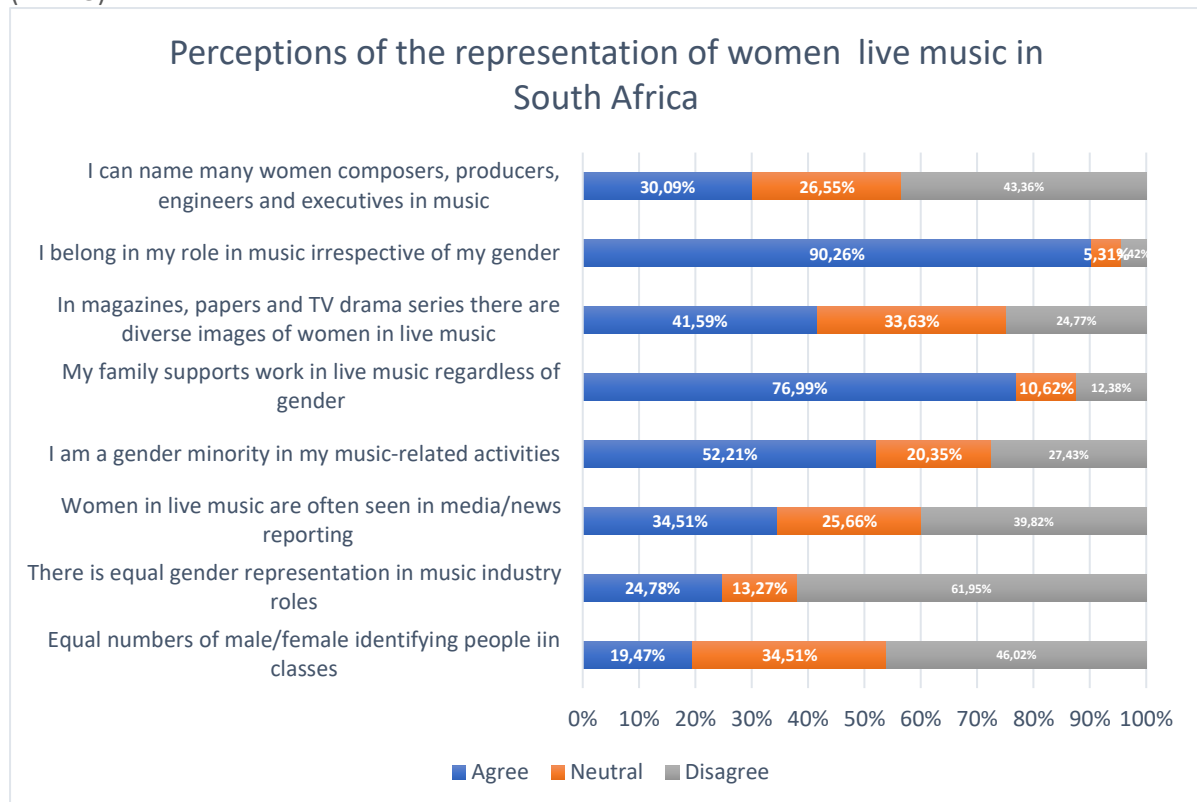
by media portrayals of women in music merits further investigation.

The largest groups of respondents **disagreed** with the following statements:

- There is equal gender representation among people who do the same music industry role as me (62%).
- I saw equal numbers of male- and female-identifying people in my post-school music education classes (46%).
- If asked, I could easily name many women composers, producers, engineers and executives in music (43%).
- 

Experience and observation of gender minority and majority roles is marked in these responses. As Chapter Five underlines, it is necessary to see women in a range of roles before other women see those roles as realistic aspirations for their own careers. So the inability to easily identify women composers, music engineers, executives and more as role models may well be one factor in the skewed job demographics this survey uncovered.

Figure 15: Respondents' perceptions of the representation of women in live music in South Africa (N=113)



#### 4.4 Equity: working conditions, status and pay in live music



Respondents to the survey were asked to respond to a series of statements describing the working conditions, perceptions of status and pay in live music. In such questions, which may touch on sensitive matters, a simple report of agreement or disagreement only tells part of the story because the percentage or aggregated percentage of contrasting views may still be significant.

The largest groups of respondents **agreed** with the following statements:

- My family understands that my music work may limit my involvement in domestic duties (65.5%).
- When working in live music, it's assumed I will perform unpaid extra non-musical roles (e.g. organising food) (62%).
- I am accepted by fellow-musicians in the role of bandleader or musical director (58%).
- I have privacy at work to change attire, wash and use the toilet (58%).
- I feel stereotyped into a particular role, style or form of self-presentation because of my gender (56%).
- I have missed work opportunities because there is a gender dimension to networking (e.g. late hours; woman-unfriendly settings) (54%).
- Work interviews/opportunities drag in issues related to my gender (50%).
- My gender predetermines the opportunities I get offered (49%).
- I have sometimes been given a title, such as music director, without the power needed to do the job properly (42.5%).
- In discussions about a collective performance, my suggestions are ignored until a man explains the same thing (41.5%).

While families are reported as largely responsive and sympathetic to the demands of music work, co-workers sometimes are – but sometimes not. Two-thirds of respondents report being expected to play specifically gendered support roles such as catering during music work; half or more experience gender-related stereotyping and exclusion from opportunities and networking, and experience work interviews which raise issues related to their gender. More than 40% record having been given tokenistic job titles without power, and having to endure “mansplaining” of their own insights and suggestions:

*“In my album recording, as a female with opinions, I was often ignored or talked over. Until I got upset about it, and then I was seen as ‘emotional’.”*

*“If you want to be successful, you must be silent and subservient.”*



Perhaps one of the most poignant qualitative comments was:

*"I've found that men don't really take me seriously, especially as an upcoming artist. Even once they've witnessed my competence and talent. They'll praise it, but not really acknowledge me. Like somehow I'm separate from my work."*

The largest groups of respondents **disagreed** with the following statements:

- My employer provides free transport when I work unsocial hours (53%).
- If I have gender-related health issues (including psychological health) I can be sure of workplace/employer support (44%).
- Potential clients/employers demand sexual favours in return for work or wages (41%).
- I have had to turn down work because I cannot access childcare (39%).

These responses reflect once more the poor labour conditions that often accompany freelance work, and the lack of support for parenting duties. Perhaps most alarming is that while just over 40% of respondents have not faced demands for sexual favours in return for work or wages – in a better world, that figure should be 100%! – nearly one-third (30%) have.

Figure 16: Respondents' perceptions of status in live music in South Africa (N=113)

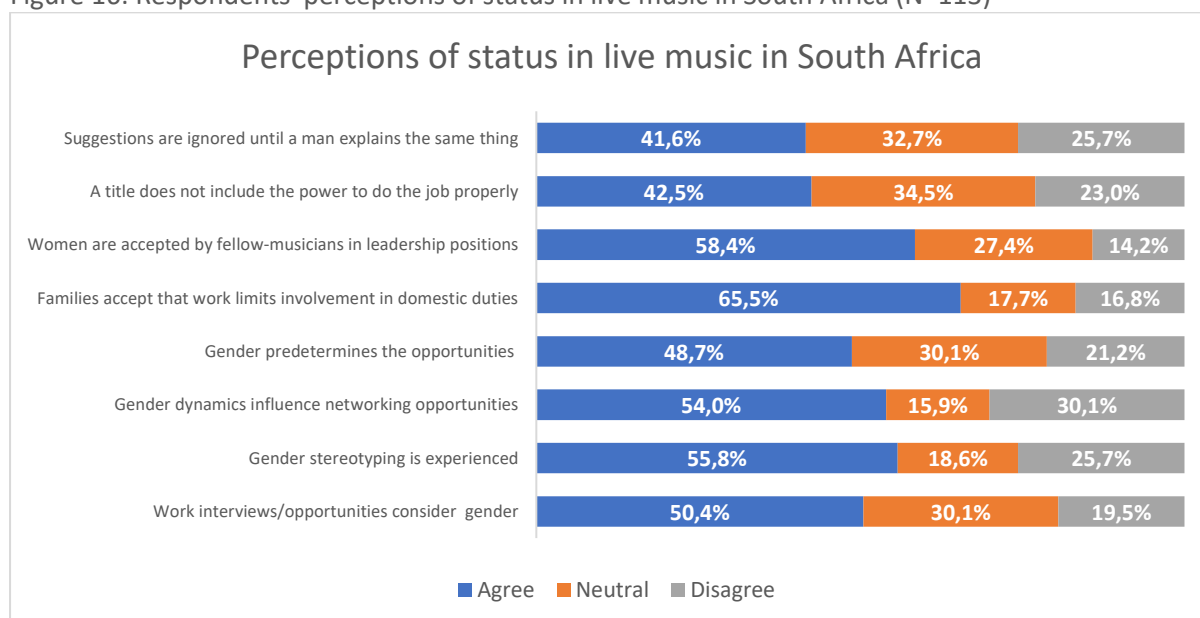
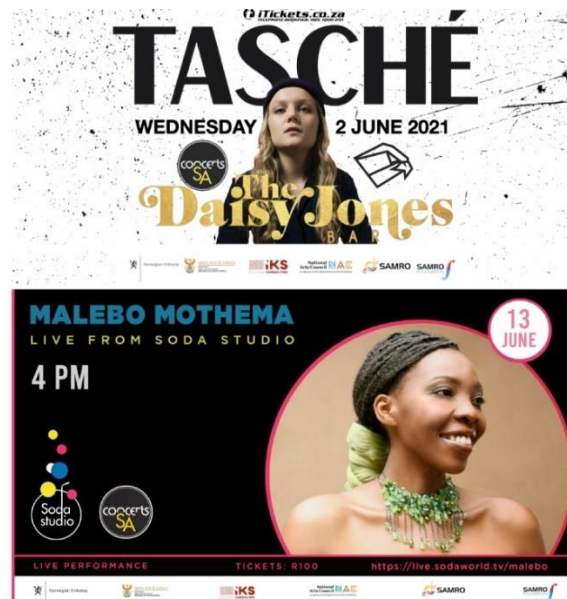
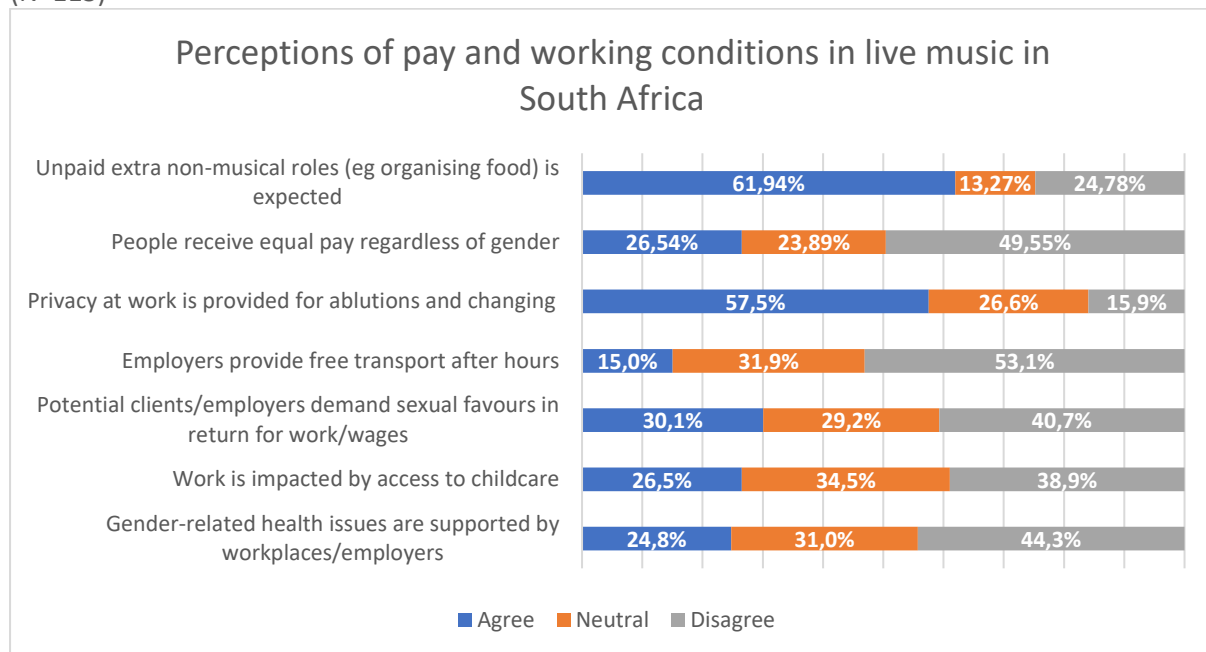
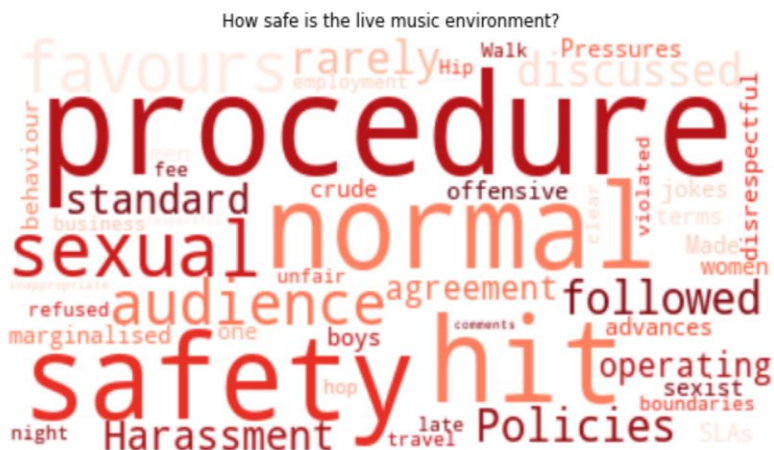


Figure 17: Respondents' perceptions of pay and working conditions in live music in South Africa (N=113)



#### 4.5 Perceptions of safety in live music



Respondents were asked to reflect on a number of statements with respect to experiences of safety in the live music sector. In such questions, which may touch on sensitive matters, a simple report of agreement or disagreement only tells half the story, because the proportion of converse views may still be significant. Further, on some of these highly personal and potentially triggering questions, a respondent's choice to enter a neutral response may mask trauma.

The largest groups of respondents **agreed** with the following statements:

- I feel unsafe travelling to/from work during late hours (68%).
- Inappropriate remarks or behaviour are common in my live music environment (63%).
- Audiences and others outside music assume I am sexually available because I am a musician (42.5%).
- Gender-related pressures at work impact on my psychological health (39%).
- My employers/clients have codes of conduct and complaints procedures about gender harassment in place (36%).

The first four items here underline how physically, socially and psychologically unsafe the live music working space feels for respondents. Just over one-third of employers are reported as having harassment policies in place – that means that for two-thirds of respondents, such policies either do not exist, or have not been communicated effectively to them.

The largest groups of respondents **disagreed** with the following statements:

- I have been pressured to enter or sustain a relationship in order to get or keep work (52 %).
- Male music workers often intrude when I'm changing, washing or simply alone backstage (47%).
- Employers/clients often bully or belittle me because of my gender (41%).
- I have experienced bullying behaviour on social media against women in live music (41%).
- Nobody around me in my music work steps in when gender-related harassment is happening (37%).

The disagreements recorded here do not mitigate the picture of unsafeness. Nearly a third (29%) of respondents have been pressured by work-related consequences to enter a sexual relationship; 15% are not granted the dignity of privacy backstage; 34.5% have experienced gender-based belittlement from employers or clients, and nearly 40% have encountered it on social media. More than a third of respondents see nobody stepping in when gender-related harassment occurs.

It is in the qualitative comments that the reality of how unpleasant and unsafe live music can be for

women and gender-diverse people emerges more vividly.

*"Unwanted 'compliments' are the hardest part of my work. I am currently the bassist in a rock band with male friends playing regular bar gigs (i.e. drunk men). There is no backstage area where we [do] not have to be around the customers. It's exhausting. I've started dressing more masculine to avoid this. I think there is generally a lot of sexualisation of women playing instruments like drums and bass."*

*"Male musicians often see female musicians as less-than or as prey (to exploit financially or for sexual favours). Flirting and even pressurizing women to accept their advances occurs often."*

*"I've often been the only woman backstage at a venue or festival line-up. Once I had to change my shirt in front of about three bands of men before going onstage at a festival because there was no changing area."*

*"I was not asked for sexual favours but it was suggested I do wet T-shirt photoshoots for publicity at age 19 by a male record executive."*

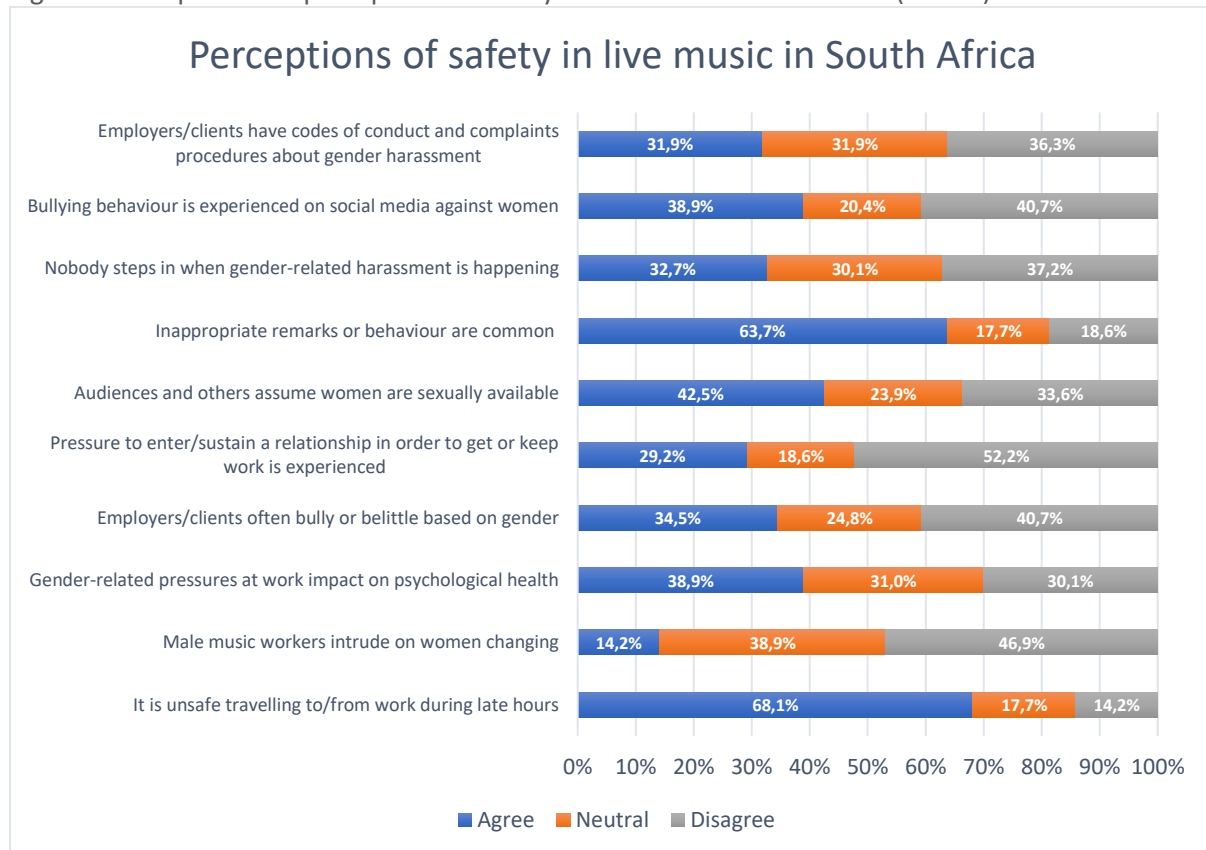


Singer Ziza Muftic and Bassist Romy Brauteseth during the Ladies on Bass workshop (2024)

*"It's still a very male-dominated industry and in some cases it's not a safe space for women and also queer artists."*

*"Most of my male colleagues have made advances at me at some stage in our careers. I have had to choose between either being 'one of the boys' – partying with them, laughing at crude, offensive jokes – or being hit on. I opted for the first one, which is not good either, as I am often offended by sexist/crude/disrespectful behaviour in my presence. But be a lady and someone will try and hit on you."*

Figure 18: Respondents' perceptions of safety in live music in South Africa (N=113)



#### 4.6 Implicit pressures and barriers: “Who feels it, knows it” (Bob Marley)

While the closed survey items provided quantifiable data on the kinds of overt gender hurdles women face, it was the qualitative responses that illustrated why women often feel that live music operates as a “boy's club”. The Bob Marley quote was deliberately chosen as an epigraph here; the experience of implicit racism is rarely questioned, while experiences of a parallel, gendered exclusion risk dismissal as too undefined. But “who feels it, knows it”. The following selection from responses indicates some more nuanced aspects:

*“It's the subtle differences of privilege and pay that makes it most evident that males control the industry.”*

*“There is far more indirect – and possibly unaware – discrimination than the direct instances that make the headlines.”*

*“It's really hard to be the only woman in musical spaces as even if the men aren't intentionally excluding you or being intentionally discriminatory, there is a level of comfort and camaraderie that they experience with each other that is difficult to tap into.”*

*“It's more subtle/unconscious than on purpose, I think. Many colleagues don't realise they are excluding me due to me being the only female in the room. There is just another type of lingo between the male musos. One needs to adapt to it or keep out of it. One on one is different and mostly better, but when there is a group...”*

*“[In the corporate or orchestra environment...], men still run things on all fronts, so the discrimination lies in opportunities for capable women.”*

Experience of these less tangible expressions of gender exclusion underline the importance of access to safe, women-only spaces as part of a range of corrective measures for women in live music. The Ladies in Bass workshop held on 27 May 2023 was such a space, and anonymised feedback from that event was shared with us as part of our research for this report. All participants at the Ladies on Bass workshop strongly supported musical development initiatives that, like this one, had all-women classes; 40% used the terms “safe”, “felt safe” or “safe space” in their responses. One response sums up several of the aspects also alluded to by others:

*“I am tired of being surrounded by mostly men by a large margin. I act like them to feel safe, but in this workshop I felt as though I was allowed to embrace a side of myself that is either over-performed or totally neglected – my own femininity.”*

#### **4.7 Measures to improve the working conditions and opportunities of women in live music**

During the panel on the experiences of women in the live music industry, considerable time was spent discussing possible actions and measures that would improve conditions for women. In the survey, respondents were asked to rank a series of twelve recommendations which emerged from this event and from a preliminary scan of international best practice, with ‘1’ being the measure or action that would have the most impact. There was also a write-in item for additional measures.

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents indicated that measures to recognise the artistic work of live music in legislation - thus allowing for the regulation of payment and working conditions - and the creation of mechanisms to enforce pay scales would be their highest priorities.

The remaining measures in the top 5 were:

- Applying gender quotas to ensure gender representivity and support for a diversity of roles (3<sup>rd</sup> ranking).
- Gender-blind auditions (4<sup>th</sup> ranking).
- Gender quotas in education and training - for educators and students - across all roles in the music sector (5<sup>th</sup> ranking).

Other measures that were ranked lower (such as provision for parenting, and more robust occupational health and safety implementation) are dependent on, and could form part of, the overarching measure of recognising musical labour as work, and legislating and regulating accordingly.

Table 4: Ranking of possible improvement measures (N=113)

Measure	Ranking
Including artistic work in the definition of work as it relates to pay rates and developing a sectoral determination of appropriate rates for music workers.	1
Creating an industry-led management mechanism with powers of enforcement for music pay.	2
Donors, funders and sponsors (including government) improving how they apply gender quotas for the music projects they fund to make sure the focus is not simply on the number of women involved, but on the diversity of roles – including senior, technical and instrumentalist roles – women play.	3
Gender-blind auditions for music performance work (where the identity of the performer is concealed).	4
Gender quotas in music education that focus not simply on the number of women employed as teachers or enrolled as students, but on improving the diversity of roles and specialisms – including senior, technical and instrumentalist – in which women teach and study.	5







modern American folk music focusing on male proponents such as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie (Pelly, in Gleeson & Gordon, 2022<sup>3</sup>). And as only one of multiple South African examples, the powerful opus of composer Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu was largely unacknowledged outside her own community until it was foregrounded by the late Sibongile Khumalo<sup>4</sup>.

This links to perceptions about what musical roles it is “natural” for male- and female-identifying people to assume. The biggest single segment of our respondents agreed that “masculine” and “feminine” musical styles existed, and 44% also assented that it was “natural” for different genders to take different roles in music. Some qualitative responses drew attention to the complexity of this issue, for example: “Whatever gender someone identifies as, we all have qualities of femininity and masculinity. One will always be stronger than the other [and] will always show in how we express ourselves in song”. Others agreed that they saw gendering of roles, citing “for example, ‘play like a man’ is frequently said”.

Our research was not designed to investigate how, in this context, “masculinity” and “femininity” are constructed. A majority of the international studies discussed in this overview chapter explicitly report women being excluded from certain roles in music because of a belief in gendered roles; none report the contrary. Many professional discussions (for example, some of the blogs and experience-oriented books cited in the bibliography) suggest the issue is one of socialisation, rather than “natural” qualities of masculinity and femininity in music: nurture, not nature. Men may be socialised – in music as in other fields of endeavour – towards hierarchical structures, distinctly defined and siloed roles, assertive, individualistic performance and results. Female socialisation may be more hospitable to fluid, egalitarian structures, spontaneity and the significance of process, with all genders in fact having the capacity for all these approaches<sup>5</sup>.

Exclusion is most prevalent for women who master non-performing roles. The MIDIA *Be The Change* 2022 report<sup>6</sup>, for example, found that out of its 952 respondents, 37% described their role as producer, 30% as engineer, and 29% as music industry executive. However, 37% of its respondents also reported tokenism, where women were allocated titles but without the commensurate power. The 2022 *Inclusion in the Recording Studio*<sup>7</sup> survey found that across 1000 popular songs examined during the period 2012-2021, women represented just under 3% of producers and only 13% of songwriters.

A 2023 report focusing on women in technical roles, *Fix the Mix*<sup>8</sup>, found that men outnumbered women and non-binary music workers 19:1 in key technical roles, including production and engineering, across the 700 widely-streamed songs in multiple genres that the researchers examined. A similar imbalance, though with minor variations, was found within individual genres. 63% of all senior roles were occupied by men. A 2023 UK dance music survey<sup>9</sup> of gender representation also pointed to a major imbalance and lack of diversity among industry decision-makers.

The lack of gender diversity among decision-makers as well as music creators was highlighted in 2019

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music, London, Cassell

<sup>3</sup> Jen Pelly “Fruits of Her Labour” in Gleeson, S., & Gordon K., (eds) (2022) *This Woman's Work: essays on music*. London, White Rabbit Press

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnXCFZNobsk>

<sup>5</sup> da Rin, R., and Parker, W., (2015) *Giving Birth to Sound: Women in Creative Music*

<sup>6</sup> MIDIA (2022) *Be the Change: women in music 2022*

<sup>7</sup> Hernandez, K., Smith, Dr S.L., and Pieper, Dr K., (2022) *Inclusion in the Recording studio 2012-2021* Southern California, USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

<sup>8</sup> [wearemovingtheneedle.org](http://wearemovingtheneedle.org) (2023) *Fix the Mix Annual Report: lost in the mix – an analysis of credited technical professions in the music industry, highlighting women and non-binary producers and engineers*

<sup>9</sup> Jaguar Foundation (2023) *Progressing Gender Representation in UK Dance Music*

academic research on music publishing by UK scholar Vick Bain<sup>10</sup>. Bain's work found that just under 14% of those signed by 106 music publishers were female, and fewer than 20% signed to 219 record labels. Under 3% of music publishing business leaders were female. Yet in the UK, girls outperform boys in music at the secondary school-leaving exam stage, and 44% of those studying music post-school are female. Bain found similar inequalities in live music as in publishing: women are under-represented in line-ups, in awards shortlists, as composers of music performed live, and as recipients of commissions for live works.

Most recently, the 2024 UK House of Commons report, *Misogyny in Music*<sup>11</sup>, pointed out how the prominence of highly successful female individuals (e.g. Beyonce, Taylor Swift) presents a misleading picture when the real situation is one of “deep-rooted underrepresentation” for women working in music. The significant numbers of women now studying music masks how exclusionary many music environments remain, with a “gendering of instruments, roles and genres” (p.14). The report made particular mention of how “singer” is presented as the default role for a woman in performance, and also highlighted the direct role of industry gatekeepers – promoters, booking agents and record label A&R (artists and recording) executives – in limiting women's representation.

Our research did not investigate the intersection of ageism and sexism in limiting women's representation, and this clearly is worth study in its own right. However, international studies have overwhelmingly found that where women experience pressure to fit a certain male gaze-led stereotype, age-related prejudices dominate the discourse. This issue was raised by more than one participant at the IKS/SAMRO/Concerts SA August 2023 launch workshop for this study. It was perhaps best summed up by DJ Nicky Blumenfeld:

*“The other thing that comes up for me as a DJ... I might look young, but I'm not young... to be honest with you, I'm 60 years old now. And when I turned 60, people came and said, ‘You're still DJ'ing?’ I said, ‘Louis Vega is older than me. Did you ask him if he's still DJ'ing?’ You know? At what point am I not fitting that mould of the objectification or the sexualisation? You're all fine if you look a certain way, and you act a certain way, and you sell a certain product as a woman... then everybody will come around you and support you. But what about if you just bring talent, skill, intelligence, and all those other qualities? Are you given the same opportunities if you don't fit into a box that has been objectified or sexualized?”* (Source: Constitution Hill workshop transcript)

## 5.2 Equity: wages and working conditions

The gendering of music roles and professional spaces, discussed under “Representation” above, relates directly to the inequity in wages and working conditions women in live music experience. Many of the roles to which stereotyping confines women have less status and power, and command lower fees.

This was seen by a majority of our respondents, and international research concurs. 42% of those surveyed by MIDIA<sup>12</sup>, for example, observed a gendered pay gap. Out of their 1600-strong sample, the *Women in the Mix*<sup>13</sup> researchers found that 52% of women and gender-expansive respondents had to work two or more jobs, and 21% reported having to rack up 40-50 hours work each week to earn a living wage. 70% felt they were treated differently because of their gender. *Fix the Mix*<sup>14</sup> also reported

<sup>10</sup> Bain, V., (2019) Counting the music industry: the gender gap – a study of gender inequality in the UK Music Industry

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons (UK), Women and Equalities Committee (2024) *Misogyny in Music* HC 129

<sup>12</sup> MIDIA, 2022 op.cit

<sup>13</sup> Recording Academy (2020) *Women in the Mix* study

<sup>14</sup> [wearemovingtheneedle.org](http://wearemovingtheneedle.org) (2023) op. cit

a gendered pay gap, and the UK House of Commons *Misogyny in Music*<sup>15</sup> report noted that pay inequalities were exacerbated by the freelance status of most music workers, with individuals negotiating fees from an isolated, vulnerable and precarious position. In our survey, too, the majority of respondents worked freelance.

The costs (in time and finance) of parenting responsibilities have been reported as a major element of inequality. The *Women in the Mix*<sup>16</sup> respondents reported a simple correlation between the fee their work commanded and their ability to afford parenting. The *Fix the Mix*<sup>17</sup> respondents reported a complete failure by employers to recognise the responsibilities they carried as parents - which carry both cost and time/availability/travel implications. The UK House of Commons Committee<sup>18</sup> stressed that parenting support “must be seen as an equity measure.”

### 5.3 Safety

The international picture is no less disturbing than the South African one.

The MIDIA<sup>19</sup> report found that while women were slightly better represented in professional music spaces post-Covid, 57% of its respondents saw “no improvement” in the persistence of sexual harassment. 40% of its respondents experienced sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour as a career barrier. A 2022 women DJ-focused study conducted in the UK by Lady of the House and Savenightlife<sup>20</sup> reported that 60.5% of its respondents had experienced sexual harassment or assault, with “inappropriate touching” while they were working as the most commonly reported form of abuse.

The UK House of Commons<sup>21</sup> report linked the prevalence of harassment, like wage exploitation, to the precarity and vulnerability of freelance working, and cited an earlier survey by the UK Musicians Union which found that 47% of its members had experienced sexual harassment.

A majority of our respondents reported that their workplaces either did not have, or did not make known, safety and anti-harassment policies. We did not probe further into what actions were taken by employers when inappropriate behaviour, bullying and sexual violence were reported to them. Many of the overseas studies did examine this aspect, and reported inaction, fob-offs, and worse, forced settlements accompanied by the imposition of a non-disclosure agreement (NDA). A study by the Incorporated Society of Musicians, *Dignity at Work*<sup>22</sup>, found that 47% of the women it surveyed had experienced some form of harassment, but that many had not reported it because of the likelihood of this kind of response.

It is not surprising, in this context, that the UK House of Commons report<sup>23</sup> foregrounded mental health as an aspect of safety, pointing out that there was – as we found here in SA – a lack of support structures or knowledge about these for victims.

South African exceptionalism might suggest that the fears about, and the need for costly counter-

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<sup>15</sup> House of Commons(UK) (2024) op.cit

<sup>16</sup> Recording Academy (2020) op.cit

<sup>17</sup> wearemovingthe needle.org (2023) op.cit.

<sup>18</sup> House of Commons (UK) (2024) op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> MIDIA(2022) op.cit

<sup>20</sup> Savenightlife/Lady of the House (2022) A study into women in music, leisure and entertainment industries at night

<sup>21</sup> House of Commons (UK) ibid

<sup>22</sup> Incorporated Society of Musicians (2018) Dignity at Work: a survey of discrimination in the Music Sector

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons (UK) ibid.

measures against, travelling home alone late at night from a gig reported by our respondents relate to this country's poor record on crime prevention and GBV. However, the study on women's inclusion and safety at night<sup>24</sup>, as well as *Fix the Mix*<sup>25</sup>, report exactly the same fears and dangers in the UK.

One specialist, university-based UK study, *Bullying and Harassment in the Music Industry*<sup>26</sup>, focused on violence in music work. Of its 574 participants – men and women – who averaged 16 years' experience in the industry, almost all reported experiencing bullying or harassment of some kind, with 80% of the perpetrators of these acts reported as male. The consequences were reported as overwhelmingly more negative for female than male survivors.

The temptation for outsiders is to draw from such findings an inference that it is the nature of the industry which creates conditions – late working hours in unsafe environments, often in the presence of alcohol – conducive to sexual violence. *Misogyny in the Music Industry*<sup>27</sup>, however, cites one of its witnesses on how misleading it is to attribute such problems to “the culture of the industry”, rather than to the perpetrators:

*“Blaming the 'culture' of the music industry is the biggest deception of them all. Informal work environments shouldn't be breeding grounds for inappropriate behaviour; partying with someone doesn't invite sexual misconduct. Alcohol doesn't assault women – people do. The problem isn't our behaviour but the fantasy men project onto it. Going to a club show and accepting a drink from a male colleague doesn't mean we want to sleep with you. It means we would like a drink.” (p.57)*

#### 5.4 What should be done?

Bain (2019)<sup>28</sup> created a useful list of twelve barriers obstructing women in building music careers. These include issues of representation (historical and industry erasure and the resulting lack of role models; the gendered stereotyping of certain careers as 'male' - composition, technical work - or 'female' – singing); equity (unconscious bias, a gendered pay gap and the undermining of female confidence); and safety (bullying, sexual harassment and unsocial hours).

For Bain, the top action priorities included government action to upgrade relevant legislation and funding for gender equity in music initiatives. She also proposed that the industry commits to supporting one gender-positive initiative every year, conduct gender equity audits on which to build recruitment targets, and more flexible working hours to accommodate parenting responsibilities. Education institutions need to be collaborating partners in such initiatives, support technical skills learning for women music students and un-gender teaching (who teaches what subject; and how specialisms are imaged). Bain noted, though, the distinct shortage of baseline mapping and numbers on which such initiatives could be built.

Many of the overseas studies used frameworks closely resembling Bain's as the basis of their recommendations for change. The MIDIA Report<sup>29</sup>, for example, framed its recommendations around four key challenges: perceptions, harassment, value (pay) and confidence. Among its respondents, for whom escaping gendered pigeonholes was the biggest challenge, mentorship around careers outside these pigeonholes was the top priority (40%), and better regulation towards gender equity from music

<sup>24</sup> Savenightlife/ Lady of the House (2022) *ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> *wearemoving the needle.org*, (2023) *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, Dr C., and Manoussaki, Dr K (2022) *Bullying and Harassment in the Music Industry: completely entangled in its fabric*, University of Winchester

<sup>27</sup> House of Commons (UK) (2024) *op.cit*.

<sup>28</sup> Bain, V., (2019) *op.cit*.

<sup>29</sup> *Be the Change* (2022) *op.cit*

organisations the second (25%). Among other recommendations, MIDIA urges that industry decision-makers actively unlearn their biases, consciously listen to women, hire gender-diverse teams, recognise situational imbalances (e.g. around parenting), and vocally call out irregularities. In line with MIDIA, 95% of *Women in the Mix*<sup>30</sup> respondents also selected mentorship as their top priority.

For *Women in the Mix*<sup>31</sup> and *Fix the Mix*<sup>32</sup>, sexism and safety were the top challenges and barriers. The latter report recommends more proactive steps to ensure safety and safe spaces, particularly around travel at night. It proposes that inclusivity riders, including provisions for keeping audiences away from DJs' working spaces and decks, should form a standard item in contracts. The organisation says that artist managers and bookers must take a role in safety by monitoring, by calling out irregularities, and by taking action.

Commitments and promises alone, however, may have limited utility. The *Inclusion in the Recording Studio*<sup>33</sup> study respondents reported that signing, for example, the Women in the Mix Pledge had little real impact on women's experience of working with signatories: the numbers of women producers or engineers hired did not change significantly. This parallels what one of our respondents noted:

*"In spaces I have worked in, policies and procedures are discussed – sometimes even available – but rarely followed."*

The House of Commons report *Misogyny in Music*, however, comes out of a context where the reporting body possesses real power. Their proposals included gender considerations in licensing venues and training for venue owners, with public funding made conditional on adherence to standards of gender equity, representivity and safety. In the UK, the creation of a Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority is currently at the planning stage.

But UK parliamentarians<sup>34</sup> also asserted that solving these problems was not about legislative measures alone:

*"Too often, problems of discrimination, harassment and misogyny are seen as women's problems. (...) Educating boys and men on misogyny and consent, how to respect and better support women and to recognise the additional challenges they face will be more transformative than any of the measures set out in this report." (p.4)*

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study is part of the first national industry initiative that engages systematically rather than anecdotally with matters impacting on women in the live music sector in South Africa. While working with a limited sample, the proportion of women who responded is an indication that further targeted research is necessary to gain insights into how gender is both perceived and experienced in the live music sector and beyond.

The responses demonstrate robustly that women are responsive to research of this nature, and that gender has a significant impact on their lives, psychological wellbeing, working roles, workplace conditions and opportunities. The numbers of women reporting harassment, bullying, stereotyping, demands for sexual favours and intense feelings of unsafeness should shock and distress readers. If, as many in music contend, musicians playing together is "like being a family", then that turns out, too

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<sup>30</sup> Recording Academy (2020) op.cit

<sup>31</sup> ibid.

<sup>32</sup> wearemovingtheneedle.org (2023) op. cit

<sup>33</sup> Hernandez, K., Smith, Dr S.L. and Pieper Dr K., (2022)op. cit

<sup>34</sup> Misogyny in Music (2024) op. cit.

often, to be a patriarchal and dysfunctional family.

Despite that, our most heartening finding (in contrast to much international research) is that a majority of respondents are confident they belong in the live music space. Women are in the business, and they demand to be heard: on stages and backstage, as performers, music business leaders and technical experts.

In that context, women have shown that they understand the importance of policy to correct the wrongs they experience, and express their concern that current policy and legislation do not adequately support their development. They have spelled out in the survey the kinds of substantial changes necessary to enshrine their rights as workers in music and enforce equitable working conditions – and, by doing so, to strengthen the rights of all music workers.

## 6.1 Recommendations

*“The more women see South African women playing music, the more women will be inspired to join the music realm. We need to make it safe for other women. We go before so others can follow.”*

Suggested areas derived from the research findings are as follows:

- (a.) Creative work in music needs to be brought within the ambit of all relevant legislation (eg labour law), which it presently is not. Legislation needs to be fit for purpose to deal with the issues outlined above. Important areas include working conditions; equal compensation for equal labour regardless of gender; and improved safety across the live music ecosystem, including transportation.
- (b.) For real change to happen, policy needs to exist and be explicitly stated, and developed for those areas not currently considered by policymakers. This needs to happen at all levels, both within the industry and in relevant departments and spheres of government.
- (c.) Both additional investigation and proactive initiatives need to be directed towards stereotypes around the gendered nature of music work and towards creating opportunities for training and employment in areas where women are underrepresented (eg sound engineers, technicians)
- (d.) [Music Industry Organisations](#) themselves could use succession planning, recruitment, and talent attraction – in particular for management and leadership positions, and in gatekeeping roles such as A&R – to achieve more equitable gender representation
- (e.) Continued and future support for established programmes for women in music. For example, SAMRO’s support for the Basadi Women in Music Awards, Basadi and SAMRO Mental Wellness and Safe Spaces Workshop, [SAMRO Business of Music Workshops](#), [SAMRO Gender equality through recruitment](#). We would draw attention in this context to Music in Africa’s 2019 *Programme to Develop Skills of Women in the Music Industry with Gender @ Work* - a pan-African, women-focused programme aimed at upskilling and increasing the participation of female professionals in the African music sector. The programme provides industry training, networking and lobbying opportunities for the interests of both professional and aspiring female music practitioners. Offering a mix of theoretical courses, practical immersive learning iterations, networking opportunities, employment, and internship possibilities as well as mentorship, and advocacy at a continental level, *Gender @ Work* offers hope for the future of women in the African music industry and could have a domino effect in other CCI sectors, and provide models for other programmes. Another example is Concord Nkabinde’s training programme, the [Ladies on Bass Workshop](#)

- (f.) Additional expenses form a burden for women in the live music sector. Women in music often bear higher attire and related expenses because of the expectation they should conform to the male gaze on stage. (A recent report suggested this cost is also a barrier to industry promotion of women: <https://www.billboard.com/culture/lifestyle/musicians-glam-hairstylists-makeup-cost-analysis-1235618969/>) This so-called “Pink Tax” should be considered a separate and reasonable expense both in calculating remuneration and for tax deduction purposes.
- (g.) Parenting costs are also significantly more onerous in a profession that entails travel and night working and compensation for this area should also be considered. This would benefit women particularly, as childcare responsibilities most often fall on them.
- (h.) Codes of ethical conduct and venue/event best practice, with associated incentives and/or sanctions, could be directed at both implicit pressures and barriers and explicit bullying, harassment and exclusion.

## 6.2 Research limitations

### 6.2.1 The experiences of those not identifying as women

This study was commissioned to investigate and map the specific circumstances that women experience in the live music workplace. We fully acknowledge that experiences universal to both women and men, as well as the specific circumstances of the gender non-conforming community, and of men specifically, also merit this type of investigation. The UK bullying and harassment study<sup>35</sup>, which surveyed both sexes, found that men, too, experienced bullying within the industry (from predominantly male perpetrators). All such additional data would be valuable to deepen understanding of what corrective measures can be effective – but that was not part of the brief for this piece of research and this was a deliberate delimitation.

### 6.2.2 Paucity of contact information about the live music community

As previously noted, there are no comprehensive music industry databases or directories, and thus certain types of responses and respondents may be missing simply because the survey did not reach them. We are, however, confident that the paucity of women in technical and leadership roles uncovered here does not result from this information gap. International research indicates that women are under-represented in these sectors of the profession everywhere.

### 6.2.3 Change over time

Because the research was a snapshot in time rather than a longitudinal study, it was not possible to study women's progression from study to work, or within their careers. Thus there was no opportunity to map changes in circumstances or to identify whether there are specific points at which female music workers drop out of the career pipeline. Both these are very important issues for policy.

### 6.2.4 Intersectional impacts

No research items probed the intersection of age and gender in how women are treated in live music. This is a prominent theme in international findings, and the researchers regret that in the circumstances of conducting a short, speedy study, it was not singled out for investigation. A longer timeframe, with space for more face-to-face interactions and the availability of counselling support, would also have permitted deeper investigation of the intersections of class, ‘race’ and gender – and of how far respondent assent to gender-related abuse having been “observed” overlaps with it actually having been “experienced.” Such issues require careful and sensitive handling, and we were reluctant to throw too many such potentially triggering and discouraging questions into an online survey. We hope the opportunity will arise to explore these areas in a more personalised and

<sup>35</sup> Jones & Manoussakis (2022) op. cit

supportive environment in future research.

### **6.3 Directions for future research**

#### **6.3.1 Industry database**

The generous cross-postings this research initiative received indicate that, potentially, much of the information to compile an up-to-date, industry-wide database/directory does exist within various organisations. Further, the cost disincentive to publishing a print directory, which may rapidly become outdated and require revision and reprints, can be eliminated by placing such a resource online. However, a legal barrier now exists because the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) restricts the sharing and publication of directory-type information initially entrusted to a single organisation. We would urge investigation of ways to deal with this hurdle. The scarcity and silo-ing of industry contact data hampers research and may hamper business collaboration too.

#### **6.3.2 Intersectional impacts**

As noted above, this research did not focus specifically on the intersectional impacts of lack of representation, inequity and insecurity in live music. This should not be interpreted as in any way minimising its importance. Within our limited timeframe and brief and the impersonal context of an online-only survey, we simply could not have done these aspects justice and provided respondents with the safeguarding required for some types of conversation. We would, however, urge that any future research building on this first study foregrounds intersectionality.

#### **6.3.3 Change over time**

How women's careers in live music develop, whether conditions are changing, and why, in particular, the rich seam of girls studying music (and doing well) is somehow disrupted so that it does not turn into larger numbers of women thriving in all career sectors of live music, were all outside the scope of a one-month snapshot of current circumstances. We would recommend that longitudinal studies be conducted into these aspects, ideally under the aegis of a cooperative relationship between the two departments of education and relevant industry bodies. Additionally, given the prevalence of self-funded study and community music education in our responses, such studies over time could consider the accessibility of scholarships and grants at different stages of music education, and whether this differs from the funding landscape for other subjects such as STEM.

#### **6.3.4 Cohort studies**

This research was a general, value-chain-based investigation that drew responses from almost all cohorts of the live music industry. Some of the most interesting and detailed overseas studies have been of specialised cohorts – for example, women DJs – and such follow-up studies in South Africa (albeit, given the demographics, that they might involve only small populations) would undoubtedly further enrich and nuance the findings of this research. Studies of demographic cohorts might deepen understanding of the apparent extreme underrepresentation of women of Indian heritage in live music. The growing importance of the recording studio, technology, and the producer in popular music – along with regularly-recurring reports of financial and sexual exploitation in this space – suggests that a focused study of the independent studio environment is long overdue.

#### **6.3.5 Developing, piloting and fine-tuning a gender barometer**

No tool or checklist currently exists to evaluate the performance of music-specific venues, management companies, projects, labels, publishers, or events against gender targets. Items in this report could form the basis for developing a “gender barometer” of how these entities measure up, against which the recipients of various forms of support could be evaluated. Such an instrument would require extensive piloting and fine-tuning to ensure it is appropriate to context, and supportive rather than punitive. A scale of appropriate responses should be developed so that withdrawal of support



for non-compliance remains on the table as a last resort, and incentives for compliance can be applied first.

#### **6.3.6 The vulnerabilities of freelance, unregulated music workers in general**

Some of our respondents to the qualitative items, as noted in various sections above, asked “What about men?” or asserted “Conditions are poor for everybody.” These are valid points. As both this research and concurring overseas studies point out, the power to negotiate improved working conditions or fees is weakened by the circumstances of freelance working for all genders. In South Africa, a further exacerbating factor is the largely unrecognised and unregulated nature of all aspects of artistic work. The top demand of our respondents – bring live music into the regulatory fold – underlines this. While some of the impacts of this situation certainly take gendered forms (e.g. pressures for sexual favours), the situation affects all live music workers. Research is urgently needed to scope and detail this broader problem and suggest appropriate policy, legislative and regulatory solutions.

## APPENDIX A: REFERENCES AND CONTEXTUAL READING

### A1. HISTORY, CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCE

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## A.2 CURRENT INDUSTRY AND SCHOLARLY RESEARCH, REPORTS & DOCUMENTS

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<sup>36</sup> Subscription-only journal

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