

Written evidence submitted by the Musicians' Union (MiM0020)

Summary

This response sets out Musicians' Union members' lived experiences of misogyny and sexism whilst working in the UK music industry. The MU conducted a snapshot survey of female and non-binary members in June 2022 in response to the call for evidence and their responses have been grouped into key themes to illustrate the expectations on women working in the music industry compared to men. The MU has also been running a Safe Space service for reporting of instances of sexual harassment and discrimination for several years; some of the case studies shared in this submission were received through that service. We also ran a survey on sexual harassment in 2019 which is referred to in our submission.

Key themes

- Intersectionality
- Lack of representation of women
- The sexualisation of female musicians
- Misogynistic and sexist assumptions
- Bullying and sexual harassment
- Lack of facilities for women

The response then goes on to answer questions from the call for evidence and offer recommendations to tackle the issues raised.

Introduction

The Musicians' Union (MU) represents over 32,000 musicians working in all sectors and genres of music.

A key pillar of the MU's work is improving the working conditions of our members and we continually campaign for a fairer, more equitable music industry that supports women and gender minorities to have full careers free from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

In 2018, we established the MU Safe Space service to provide a safe place for musicians to share instances of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse in the music industry. Safe Space helps the MU to build up a picture of the problems that exist in the music industry and seek long term solutions. We also offer advice and abuse to survivors. Since the launch of Safe Space, we have received hundreds of reports ranging from sexist comments and cultures to sexual assault and rape. Incidents have been reported from all areas of the music industry as well as music education; the issues for women and girls do not exist in just one area of music but sadly across all workplaces and genres.

We live in a misogynistic society. The 2021 UN Women UK YouGov survey found that 71% of women of all ages in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space – this number rises to 86% among 18-24-year-olds¹. Unfortunately, the music industry will reflect the misogyny that exists in wider society. However, we would argue based on the reports made to us that the music industry has higher incidences for the following reasons:

¹ https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women_Sexual-Harassment-Report_2021.pdf

- 90% of our members are freelance and the industry is heavily staffed by freelancers. The work is precarious and freelancers do not enjoy the protections in law that employees do.
- There is a power imbalance in many working relationships in the music industry; individuals can make or break careers. Again, this is a particular problem for freelancers who rely on being offered their next job.
- Late night working, informal work environments such as festival sites and tour buses, prevalence of alcohol and drugs in workplaces are all features of the industry that can facilitate abuse.
- As we will detail elsewhere in our submission, the music industry remains male-dominated and particularly in senior roles.

A snapshot survey conducted by the MU in June 2022 asked MU members to share their lived experiences of misogyny and sexism whilst working in the music industry. Over 80 members responded and over 90% of respondents said they have experienced misogyny and/or sexism whilst working in the music industry.

Their responses have been grouped into key themes below supported by direct quotes from the respondents.

Intersectionality

It's important to acknowledge from the outset of this submission that misogyny and sexism affects different groups of people in different ways.

Over 65% of respondents to the 2022 snapshot survey who had experienced misogyny and/or sexism said this was linked to an additional characteristic, for example ethnicity, age, caring responsibilities, or gender identity.

This correlates with a wider piece of MU research conducted in 2019 on sexual harassment in the music industry which found that almost one in three members felt that the sexual harassment they experienced was linked to a protected characteristic.”²

These behaviours are often experienced combined with and driven by agism, racism, LGBT+ phobia, ableism, and assumptions about women's ability to perform if they are pregnant or have caring responsibilities.

Viewing misogyny and sexism through an intersectional lens is imperative if the issues are to be tackled effectively. An MU member who responded to the 2022 snapshot survey commented:

“I have had multiple occasions of being told by men that I have only been booked because of my ethnicity and because I am female. Over time, this created doubts surrounding my abilities as an artist.”

Intersectional experiences of misogyny and sexism have also been highlighted in Black Lives in Music's (BLiM) report “Being Black in the UK Music Industry”. The results of the survey confirm how race and gender, especially for Black women, intersect and overlap to amplify the negative experiences of Black women in the music industry. 70% of women

² <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/legal-money/workplace-rights-and-legislation/the-equality-act-and-guidance/sexual-harassment-at-work/report-on-sexual-harassment-in-music-industry>

respondents to the BLiM survey said they felt they had felt the need to change something about themselves in order to get ahead and be accepted by the industry.³

There is a lack of representation of women in the sector

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey commented on the lack of women in workplaces across the sector and a distinct lack of female role models and women in leadership positions. More than one participant commented “*it’s a boys club*”. This emerged as a main theme and one of the reasons why respondents felt that many cultures and working environments in the music industry are misogynistic by nature.

The 2020 UK Music Diversity Taskforce survey found that there is an underrepresentation of women in senior positions within the sector. Women represent 40.4% of the sector at senior level.⁴

The lack of women in leadership positions has also been highlighted by Arts Council England’s research “Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music” which found that though women make up a substantial portion of the workforce, they are less well represented in senior roles like orchestral principals, as solo artists, in artistic leadership roles and elsewhere; they also appear to be overrepresented amongst the educational workforce, but less well represented in other activities like recording and theatre work.⁵

A lack of women in decision making capacities has led to workplaces that don’t support women in aspects of their lives such as starting a family, having caring responsibilities or policies that support older women such as menopause policies. As workplaces are dominated by men, and for fear of causing problems, quite often women do not feel comfortable raising these issues. When women do raise these issues their commitment to work is questioned and quite often it can have a detrimental impact on their careers.

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey reported they are actively excluded in decision making processes even when they are in a leadership position, undermined and quite often feel that some men only feel comfortable dealing with women when they are at a subordinate level.

“I’ve worked in a few contexts (usually as the only woman in the room) where my thoughts and opinions have been completely ignored. In some cases, the same ideas have been regurgitated by a male and suddenly everyone thinks it’s a great idea.”

This view is supported by a recent report “Bullying and Harassment in the Music Industry (BaHMI) Project” which found that most respondents to a survey agreed that the music industry favours non-disabled people, younger age groups and is orientated toward men. Half agreed that the UK music industry favours white British people over other ethnic groups.⁶

³ <https://blim.org.uk/report/>

⁴ <https://www.ukmusic.org/equality-diversity/uk-music-diversity-report-2020/>

⁵ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

⁶ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360901368_Bullying_and_Harassment_in_the_Music_Industry_Completely_entangled_in_its_fabric?channel=doi&linkId=629115ff8d19206823dfdc4&showFulltext=true

The lack of women in leadership positions can have a direct impact on women's career opportunities and progression. In organisations where men are overrepresented the MU has received reports that women have been passed over for promotion or lost out on jobs because the organisations had concerns over how men would have behaved if a woman was introduced to the workforce.

Responding to the MU 2022 snapshot survey, one member commented that because she was a woman she was told:

"We had to consider how he'll behave with the new section member' when deciding who was going to get the job"

The implication was that the man in the organisation could not be trusted to behave appropriately around women and therefore it would be easier to employ a man to work with him.

Men do not experience the additional barriers of navigating sexism which work against women having sustainable careers in the music industry.

The sexualisation of female musicians

"When teaching in a boy's school receiving unwanted attention and comments ranging from whistles to abusive name calling to suggest I am either too highly sexed or too little. Or 'somebody's mother'. But it was always necessary to grade/ identify/ label me sexually- I couldn't simply be allowed to be an instrumental teacher as the men were"

The sexualisation of women is a major problem in the music industry and comes in many forms and from various places. Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey reported that they were often judged on their appearance before their ability as a musician and had lost out on work because they were deemed *"not attractive enough"* or didn't have the right *"body type"*.

When women are employed, respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey reported that it's assumed they were only hired because the employer wanted to have sex with them and endured inappropriate questions about their bodies and sex lives.

"I have routinely experienced my colleagues making inappropriate comments, comments about other women's appearance, comments about women's bodies and sexist comments in general and felt like I had to go along with the "joke" and not make a fuss in order to be accepted"

The MU has also received reports related to dress codes for female musicians. For example, a group of highly skilled female session players were engaged for a gig and when they arrived they were given hot pants to wear and toy instruments to hold. They weren't hired for their playing ability at all.

Some employers request all female bands or sections to promote a "sexy image". Whilst the MU fully supports organisations taking steps to improve the diversity of its workforce it cannot support practices that are tokenistic and reduce women to nothing more than their appearance.

The sexualisation of female musicians doesn't stop in the workplace. Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey commented that constant comments about their appearance on

social media and reviews of their work that comment on their attractiveness rather than their musicianship all contribute to a culture where a female musician's worth is based on their looks and perceived sexual availability.

Reviews of female musician's work can often focus on their physical appearance in a way that men are not subjected to. A recent review of Yuja Wang began with:

*"Onto a stage bounds a young woman in a backless gown slit up to the hip, or a micro-dress cut an inch below the butt. That's right, I've turned into a fashion critic. And the moment these words appear I shall come under a social-media onslaught for committing the unforgivable male offence of reporting what a female artist wears, instead of how she plays."*⁷

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey noted that they had changed their behaviours or appearances to avoid being sexualised or sexually harassed. We have repeatedly heard women talk about having to assimilate into the boy's club environment in order to be accepted by male colleagues. We have also heard repeatedly of women leaving the music industry because of the negative experiences they have had.

Misogynistic and sexist assumptions

Another common theme that emerged from the MU 2022 snapshot survey was misogynistic and sexist assumptions about the roles, technical abilities and instruments female musicians were allowed to perform and play.

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey commented that there was a lack of confidence from employers in their abilities based on the fact that they were women and that very often women were asked if they were fans, rather than musicians or it was assumed they must be singers not instrumentalists.

A recurring theme was issues with men assuming women could not have any technical knowledge and dismissing female musicians' technical abilities.

"I've experienced rude male sound engineers who totally dismiss the fact that I'm the band's drummer, they assume I don't know my own gear, can't play etc. Being in an all-female band, it happens a lot."

Many respondents commented that a lot of the issues they experience in the workplace start in music education. This includes being treated differently to boys/men in educational settings.

"Through being cat called in rehearsals as a student, as well as being made to feel uncomfortable by male lecturers at university - girls/women were told they couldn't play their instrument properly if they didn't sit with their legs open in orchestra rehearsals on more than one occasion."

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey stated that they expected to encounter misogynistic attitudes as part of working in the music industry. This points to the behaviour becoming so normalised that it has become part of the job.

"I think the fact that women and other gender minorities working in the music industry expect to encounter misogyny in their workplace says a lot about the state of the music industry."

⁷ <https://slippedisc.com/2021/10/why-yuja-wang-cant-have-it-both-ways/>

There are also expectations of what instruments women should and can play. Where women did play instruments that are considered “masculine” they reported they are often held to a higher standard than their male counterparts.

“I get comments sometimes about why I play the double bass, sometimes crude, usually more to the effect of it being an unladylike instrument/big/heavy”

“A key player of related instrument was at my flat and said to me ‘female players have smaller lungs, but that’s okay! They just have to take more breaths”

These biases could be seen as ‘harmless’ or isolated however, it’s concerning that people who hold these, or similar bias views are in positions of power and ultimately make decisions on who is and isn’t employed.

This view is supported by research from Arts Council England “Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music” that found for some instruments, or groups of instruments, there is a strong relationship with gender, which can be seen in young learners and likewise reflected in the workforce.”⁸

This influences the workforce and can mean that certain instrument groups are dominated by men which impacts the talent pipeline of female musicians, their opportunities for work and career progression.

In less formalised employment spaces, it is harder to challenge these biases and when women do this quite often has a significant, negative impact on their career.

Bullying and sexual harassment

Bullying and sexual harassment is a common theme that emerged from the MU 2022 snapshot survey and an issue that the MU is unfortunately very familiar with.

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey reported a range of bullying behaviours such as being humiliated in public, being isolated, and ridiculed in front of colleagues all of which the respondents noted was related to their gender.

Respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey reported being sexually harassed by colleagues, employers and audience members which ranged from sexually explicit jokes, unwanted touching and being showed videos of an explicit nature. Some respondents reported sexual assault and rape.

In 2019, the MU conducted a survey of our members to more accurately assess the factors that contribute to this problem. Almost 800 musicians reported their experiences to us, revealing that sexual harassment is an all too frequent occurrence for musicians at all levels of their careers.

The research found that:

- Almost half (48%) of members have experienced sexual harassment.
- Over 58% of members have witnessed sexual harassment.
- Over 85% of members who experienced sexual harassment did not report it.
- Over half (56%) of these members cited workplace culture as a barrier to reporting.

⁸ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

- 40% of these members said that fear of losing work was the reason they didn't report their experience.⁹

A common theme of the reports we receive through Safe Space is men abusing their power to instigate and maintain coercive sexual relationships with women. Promises of work, career progression or the threat of retaliation against women professionally if they refuse to participate are used by men to sexually harass women without consequence. These behaviours prevent women working in certain organisations where there are known sexual harassers.

Where women do report their experiences, the MU has found that they become the problem and they are deemed as "difficult to work with" or their experiences are denied.

"I am constantly challenged and argued against, when I am telling my own lived experience, and it is exhausting."

Lack of facilities for women

The final theme that emerged is the lack of facilities and structural support for women working in the music industry. Respondents reported that they were treated as "*one of the lads*" and expected to share rooms with colleagues, male and female whilst on tour and in some cases were asked to share beds.

Quite often there is no consideration given to female changing facilities and women are expected to change in front of their male colleagues or in their car which obviously raises safety concerns.

The MU has received one report of a female musician who was forced to urinate at the side of the road because her colleagues would not allow the driver to stop at a toilet. This incident was treated as a joke.

Conclusion of themes

It is tempting to think of the quotes and anecdotal data used throughout this submission as extremes or exceptions, but these only represent a small fraction of the stories the MU hears of the misogyny, sexism and abuse that women working in the music industry face.

Whilst many of the issues are not unique to the music industry there are some factors to consider that make these behaviours more likely and much harder to tackle such as late-night working, often in environments where drugs and alcohol are consumed, casual employment practices that rely on networks for employment, insecure work and short-term contracts.

Combined, these themes create culture of misogyny and unsafe workplaces that limit women's careers, opportunities for progression, negatively impact mental health and in some cases results in women leaving the industry altogether.

What types of support exists for women experiencing sexism or misogyny in the music industry? How can they report problems or abuse?

⁹ <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/legal-money/workplace-rights-and-legislation/the-equality-act-and-guidance/sexual-harassment-at-work/report-on-sexual-harassment-in-music-industry>

There is still a widespread lack of reporting of, sexism, misogyny, sexual harassment and abuse. Survivors fear they will lose work opportunities if they report, won't be believed, or that it won't be dealt with appropriately. The MU has seen many cases in which these fears have been realised.

The power imbalance between freelancers and the people who engage them also contributes to sexual harassment going unreported. A respondent to the MU 2019 survey on sexual harassment expressed the views of many members very clearly when they stated:

“When a freelancer relies on an individual for work, they are less likely to speak out.”

Over 85% of members who responded to the 2019 MU survey on sexual harassment at work did not report incidents of sexual harassment they experienced.¹⁰

In the more recent MU 2022 snapshot survey, some members could identify organisations that offered support such as the MU and Help Musicians, but most were unaware of any support being available and identified issues with reporting such as fear of losing work, fear of not being believed and fear of damage to their reputation.

The MU provides support to women experiencing sexism, misogyny, sexual harassment, and abuse through our membership services and more widely via our Safe Space service.

There are also various industry initiatives such as Help Musicians who run a helpline open to anyone working in the music industry who is looking for help with bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment and various codes of conduct that have been created by industry bodies to improve behaviours and working conditions.

The MU, along with UK Music and other industry bodies are engaged in plans for the creation of an Independent Standards Authority (ISA).¹¹ The ISA is an organisation devised by TIME'S UP UK, that would support the reporting and investigation of misconduct complaints and improve accountability across the creative industries.

An initial phase to establish the ISA is currently underway involving film, theatre, and TV with music to be brought in once the initial phase has been established. The MU fully supports the creation of the ISA.

How safe do women and girls feel at live music concerts and festivals?

A survey by the MU in 2019 found that 48% of musicians had experienced sexual harassment at work and that 61% felt that freelancers are at greater risk of being sexually harassed.¹²

¹⁰ <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/legal-money/workplace-rights-and-legislation/the-equality-act-and-guidance/sexual-harassment-at-work/report-on-sexual-harassment-in-music-industry>

¹¹ <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/major-uk-broadcasters-back-calls-for-an-isa-to-tackle-bullying-and-harassment>

¹² <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/new-statistics-on-sexual-harassment-chime-with-those-in-music-industry>

The most shocking part of the research was how sexual harassment has become a normalised, almost expected, part of working as a musician. One member described sexual harassment as being an “occupational hazard”.

In 2021 UN Women research discovered that more than 7 in 10 women have been sexually harassed in the UK, and over 40% of women aged under 40 at a live music event. Within the music sector, over 60% of workers have experienced sexual harassment¹³.

We asked respondents to the MU 2022 snapshot survey how safe they felt working as a musician at live music concerts and festivals.

- 47% Felt somewhat safe
- 25% Felt very safe
- 10% Felt unsafe
- 2% Felt very unsafe

Sexual harassment is common in the music industry. Members have reported that they've left the workplace or even the industry because of sexual harassment. In many cases, the perpetrator remains in the workplace and the survivor must leave.

Musicians work in a range of environments where sexual harassment may be more likely to take place, for example live music venues, festivals, pubs and environments in which alcohol consumption is likely. There is also a significant power imbalance between musicians and the people who engage them to do work, which can make sexual harassment more likely and more difficult to challenge.

Do you think there's a correlation between misogynistic lyrics in music and violence against women and girls?

The MU is anti-censorship but condemns any lyrics that incites violence or hatred against women and girls or any other community.

As misogyny exists throughout society it will also exist in the lyrics and themes that some musicians choose to explore through their music. Music and artistic self-expression reflect an individual's lived experiences and to tackle and dismantle the production of misogynistic content, there should be a focus on tackling the root causes of misogyny through education.

Research has highlighted that between age 11 to 15, girls and boys strive to develop identities which primarily conform to existing cultural norms in relation to social expectations of femininity and masculinity respectively. Boys and girls alike are quick to negatively highlight any deviation from established gender expectation by their peers either from members of the same or the opposite sex.¹⁴

Tackling misogyny and sexist stereotyping, that entrenches misogynistic behaviours in men and boys' and encourages them to conform to sexist and misogynistic gendered expectations should be a priority.

Frameworks such as the BPI's Parental Advisory Guidelines already exist within the music industry to ensure that if music contains material that consumers may find offensive or unsuitable for children it is clearly labelled.¹⁵

¹³ <https://www.unwomenuk.org/safe-spaces-in-music>

¹⁴ <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/equality/Gender/Get%20it%20Right%20for%20Girls%202016%20WEB.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.bpi.co.uk/media/1047/parental-advisory-guidelines.pdf>

Any action taken to tackle misogynistic lyrics must be balanced and proportionate and should not disproportionately impact already marginalised musicians and communities.

What steps do you think the Government and other industry bodies should take to tackle misogynistic and/or sexist attitudes in the music industry?

The UK music industry is working together on creating safer workplaces, free from discrimination and harassment with equal representation of all underrepresented groups.

Societal assumptions are replicated in the music industry and those structures that support misogyny and sexism need to be tackled society wide.

The MU is taking steps internally to tackle misogyny and sexism through staff surveys where women can share their experiences and through the creation of a working group that will make recommendations to improve the working culture of the MU and ensure that no women experiences misogyny or sexism as a member of MU staff.

The MU has also created the Music Sector Code of Practice¹⁶ in partnership with ISM to tackle and prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination and provides the Safe Space service to the entire industry.¹⁷

Initiatives such as UK Music's 10 Point Plan¹⁸ are a crucial part of making the industry more representative. The 10 Point Plan offers industry organisations a clear set of aims and objectives that can guide organisations to be more inclusive and representative. Long term this will help reduce incidents of misogyny and other discriminatory and non-inclusive behaviours by ensuring greater representation of those groups that are currently unrepresented in key decision-making positions.

Members report a lack of confidence in government having the ability to tackle misogyny and sexism given the ongoing reports of institutional sexism and misogyny in parliament. Government should take direct action to tackle its own misogynistic and sexist cultures as a starting point.

There are multiple opportunities for government to work with the MU and the wider music industry to implement changes that play a crucial part of shaping the experiences of women working in the sector.

Recommendations

Industry

- Implement robust policies and procedures for combatting misogyny, sexual harassment, and discrimination.
- Provide equality, diversity, and inclusion training with specific training on sexual harassment for all workers.

¹⁶ <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/legal-money/workplace-rights-and-legislation/the-equality-act-and-guidance/sexual-harassment-at-work/music-sector-code-of-practice-en>

¹⁷ <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/safespace>

¹⁸ <https://www.ukmusic.org/equality-diversity/ten-point-plan/#:~:text=This%20Ten%2DPoint%20Plan%20has,of%20the%20UK%20music%20industry.>

- Invest in active bystander training.
- Provide multiple, clear, and accessible reporting mechanisms, including anonymous methods so all workers can raise a complaint safely.
- Work towards equal representation of women in decision making positions and senior leadership roles.
- Conduct sexual harassment risk assessments and create action plans to reduce risks.
- Support the creation of the Independent Standards Authority.

Education

- Consider how misogyny as gender stereotyping impacts students instrument and subject choice and take steps to tackle this.
- Implement equality, diversity and inclusion modules and acceptable behaviour as core parts of the curriculum in colleges, universities and conservatories.
- Consistent and regular discussions with students regarding misogyny, sexism, and gender equality.

Legislative change

- Introducing the preventative duty in the next parliamentary session.
- Extend the protections relating to discrimination and harassment in the Equality Act 2010 to all freelancers so that they are entitled to the same protections as the wide range of individuals in the workplace who are already protected.
- Reinstate section 40 of the Equality Act 2010 without the three strikes rule to protect all workers from third party harassment.
- Review the limit of two characteristics within Section 14 of the Equality Act 2010, so the law acknowledges that overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination impacts on people who experience sexual harassment.
- Extend limitation periods for discrimination and sexual harassment claims to at least six months.
- Legislate to make NDAs unenforceable for anything other than their original purpose, the prevention of sharing confidential business information and trade secrets.
- Introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting and widen gender pay gap reporting for companies with over 50 employees.
- Supply funding to develop mental health services equipped to deliver culturally appropriate and accessible care.

July 2022