

A study of artists' working environment

Results of a survey from 2016 addressed to artists in the fields of visual and applied Artists, dance, film, music, words and theater



Summary

A study of artists' working environment in Sweden

The task of the Swedish Arts Grants Committee is to facilitate artists' pursuit of their profession and to encourage artistic development in general. The agency is also required to analyse the social conditions of artists in Sweden. As part of this endeavour, the Arts Grants Committee has for the first time studied artists' working environment. It surveyed those who applied for funding from the Arts Grants Committee itself or from the Swedish Authors' Fund in 2013, 2014 and 2015 within the categories of art & design, dance, film, music, writing and theatre. A total of 1 859 artists completed the survey, which represents a response rate of 34 per cent.

The questions were framed by drawing both on the Swedish Work Environment Authority's questionnaire used to compile official statistics for the labour market as a whole, and on the Arts Grants Committee's previous studies. For its 2016 study, the Work Environment Authority changed a number of the questions and deleted others. Consequently, the questions are not always comparable with the official statistics in this field. The questions in the survey concern both the physical and the psychosocial working environment, and cover both commonplace and unusual circumstances. As a result, the issues dealt with are in part more applicable to certain artistic categories or work situations than to others. This needs to be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Solitary work

- 14 per cent of the artists experience involuntary mental solitude in their work. Involuntary physical solitude is slightly less widespread, at 11 per cent.

Some artistic forms include solitary work of both a voluntary and an involuntary nature. A majority of the artists state that they never or almost never work alone involuntarily, either in the physical (59 per cent) or the mental (54 per cent) sense. Involuntary physical solitude is slightly less extensive than involuntary mental solitude in the artist group. The responses in the survey show that artists in the art & design, film and dance categories experience a greater degree of involuntary solitude, both physical and mental, while artists in the categories of writing and theatre do so to a lesser extent.

Demands and stress

- 40 per cent of the artists state that they are seldom or never able to obtain help or support when their work feels difficult.

Over half of the group (56 per cent) state that they always or for the most part are able to do so. However, a large share of the respondents, 40 per cent, state either that they never have this option or for the most part lack access to such help or support. In comparison with the corresponding figure for the labour market as a whole, 15 per cent, this is a significant proportion. The differences between the sexes and artistic categories in this respect are small.

- A total of 37 per cent of the artists experience an excessively heavy workload.

On the question of whether they considered their workload reasonable, almost 60 per cent replied that it always is, or is for the most part, while 37 per cent felt it was never reasonable or was not so for the most part. The most vulnerable artists are those working in dance or film, where about 50 per cent replied that their workload was too heavy.

A large proportion of the artists, 66 per cent, feel that they are always or almost always able to influence their work rate. This is more than twice the proportion who feel they are unable to influence their work rate (32 per cent). The freedom to influence one's work rate is generally more pronounced in artistic categories where solitary work is more frequent than among more collective art forms such as theatre and dance.

- 44 per cent of the artists state that they are always or for the most part so stressed that they have time neither to talk about or think about anything but their work.

The final question in this section deals with being so stressed at times that the artists are incapable of talking or thinking about anything but their work. Stress is more extensive among women than men and greater in the collective art categories – dance (55 per cent) and theatre (51 per cent) – than in the more individual ones.

Social work climate

- 41 per cent of the artists had been involved in conflicts at work during the preceding 12 months .
- 29 per cent, compared with 22 per cent for the labour market as a whole, experienced a 'constrained atmosphere/lack of tolerance' at their workplace.

In the survey, questions concerning conflict, discrimination, harassment and bullying, and sexual harassment, threats and violence are divided into three contexts: conflict with *managers* (or the equivalent), *colleagues* (or the equivalent) and *others* (e.g. audiences or the general public).

Altogether 41 per cent of the artists (713 out of 1 723) stated that they had been involved in a conflict in relation to their artistic activity at some time or more often during the preceding 12 months. The study indicates that conflicts with people at management level or in relation to colleagues are more common in artistic environments than in the labour market as a whole. In the artist group, 39 per cent stated that they had been involved in a conflict of some kind with managers or colleagues over the past year. The corresponding figures for the labour market as a whole are 25 per cent for conflicts with managers and 32 per cent for conflicts with colleagues.

Conflicts with others (e.g. audiences or the general public), however, are not as frequent among artists as in the labour market as a whole: 22 per cent of the artists say they have been exposed to such conflicts at least once over the past year. The corresponding figure for the labour market is higher: 34 per cent. Artists in the theatre and writing categories are more exposed than others. In contrast to the labour market as a whole, men experienced such conflicts more than women.

A larger proportion of the artist group (29 per cent) than of the labour market as a whole (22 per cent) feel it is difficult to criticise their working conditions.

Discrimination

- 25 per cent of the artists have been exposed to discrimination.
- In all, 37 per cent of the artists who state that they have been discriminated against have abstained from artistic activity as a result.

A total of 25 per cent of the artists (431 out of 1 716) state that they have been exposed to discrimination on one occasion or more over the past 12 months. The figure for the labour market as a whole is 10 per cent and this can serve as a benchmark. Experience of discrimination is more common in relation to managers (16 per cent) than in relation to colleagues or others (11 per cent). Gender and then age are by far the most common grounds for discrimination, followed by ethnicity. Gender-based discrimination is felt to be most extensive in relation to managers while age discrimination is slightly more common in relation to colleagues. Ethnic discrimination, meanwhile, is more common in relation to others. The same applies to discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Whatever the context, gender-based discrimination affects women more than men, especially in relation to colleagues or others. Female artists are victims of age discrimination to a greater extent than men, but here the differences between the sexes are not as great. Men experience ethnic discrimination to a greater extent than women.

In all, 37 per cent or 160 of the 431 artists who have experienced discrimination state that they abstained from artistic activity as a result on at least one occasion during the year. In the categories of music and writing, almost half of the artists who experienced discrimination said they abstained from artistic activity as a result.

Harassment and bullying

- 15 per cent of the artists state that they have been exposed to harassment or bullying in the course of their work over the past 12 months.
- 43 per cent of the artists who state that they have been harassed or bullied said they had abstained from artistic activity as a result.

The number of artists who suffered harassment or bullying (259 out of 1 705 individuals) was lower than the number exposed to discrimination. Harassment is slightly more frequent in relation to colleagues than to managers, and slightly less widespread in relation to others.

In contrast to the discrimination category, age is said to be the most common reason for harassment and bullying in relation to the corresponding manager or colleague. In relation to others, gender is by far the most common reason and affects women twice as much as men. Women are also exposed to harassment on grounds of gender to a greater extent than men in relation to colleagues and managers. Men and women are exposed to harassment on grounds of age to roughly the same extent in all three contexts. In relation to others, men are exposed to harassment to a significantly greater degree than women on grounds of ethnicity, religion or other belief.

Of the 259 artists who state that they were exposed to harassment or bullying, 110 (43 per cent) abstained from artistic activity as a result on one occasion or more over the past 12 months. In the writing category, where harassment and bullying are least widespread, the proportion of artists who stated that they had abstained from artistic activity as a result was the largest of all.

Sexual harassment, threats and physical violence

- Just over 9 per cent of the artists have been exposed to sexual harassment, threats or physical violence.
- In all, 34 per cent of the artists exposed to such behaviour abstained from artistic activity because of it.

A qualified majority of the artists who responded were exposed neither to sexual harassment, threats nor physical violence in the course of their work over the past 12 months. Of a total of 1 695 responding artists, 60 (3.5 per cent) had been exposed to sexual harassment, 92 to threats (5.3 per cent) and 7 to physical violence (0.4 per cent). In the official statistics, by way of comparison, 2 per cent state that they were exposed to sexual harassment in relation to a *manager or colleague* at some point over the past 12 months, and 6 per cent in relation to others. A total of 14 per cent were exposed to *threats of violence or actual violence* over the past year, according to the 2016 reports of the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

The survey results indicate that sexual harassment on the part of colleagues is the most extensive type. Vulnerability is greater in the more collective art forms – especially dance and theatre – than in categories such as writing or art & design. Threats appear to be more frequent in the collective art forms. The most common threats against artists were in relation to others, such as audiences or the general public. Incidents involving physical violence are rare, and 7 people said they had been exposed to it over the past 12 months.

In all, 34 per cent – 53 of the 157 artists who experienced sexual harassment, threats or physical violence – had abstained from artistic activity as a result. Seventeen people had abstained as a result of sexual harassment, 35 as a result of threats and 1 as a result of physical violence.

The physical working environment

- Overall, 84 per cent of the artists perceived deficiencies in their physical working environment, while 16 per cent did not.

Of the total of 1 675 artists, 1 399 reported such deficiencies. These primarily concerned poorly adapted heating and ventilation and defects of a more general nature at the artists' workplace. Between 37 per cent and 39 per cent experienced such deficiencies for a quarter of their worktime or more frequently.

In respect of issues that can be compared with official statistics, the artist group is both above and below the levels reported there. Twenty-two per cent of the artists were exposed to excessively high sound levels for a quarter of their worktime. Musicians in particular were

affected (43 per cent), but also other artists. The corresponding figure for the labour market as a whole is 25 per cent. Artists were more exposed to poor lighting (25 per cent) than the labour market as a whole (15 per cent). The problems were greatest in the dance category, where 37 per cent reported experiencing them for a least a quarter of their worktime. Skin contact with chemicals was something that those in the art & design category were exposed to most: 31 per cent, as against 8 per cent for the labour market as a whole.

- Overall, 44 per cent of the artists noted defective air quality at the workplace, while 56 per cent did not.

Issues relating to air quality concerned fewer members of the artist group (739 out of 1 671) than the above issues concerning heating and the design of personal workplaces. In terms of the various individual issues, respondents in the art & design category were most exposed to defective air quality. Organic dust in the air affected 20 per cent of the artists for at least a quarter of their worktime, compared with 12 per cent for the labour market as a whole. In the art & design and theatre categories, 30 per cent of the artists were negatively affected. At the overall level, reported exposure to non-organic dust was roughly the same for the artist group as for the labour market (10 and 11 per cent respectively). The figure is considerably higher, however, in the case of those in the art & design category: 22 per cent. The same applies to chemicals in the air, where 23 per cent of those in the art & design category reported exposure, compared with 8 per cent for the artist group in general and for the labour market as a whole.

- Overall, 80 per cent of the artists felt they were at risk of injury due to their posture and movement at work, while 20 per cent did not feel exposed to any such risk.

In all, 1 327 out of 1 668 artists felt they were at risk of injury at work: 54 per cent felt there was a risk of injury due to monotonous and repetitive movements, while 37 per cent experienced risk of injury from physically arduous tasks. Artists in the dance category are particularly vulnerable. Also, 44 per cent replied that there was a risk of injury as a result of static strain on the body. The problems are more pronounced in the music, art & design and writing categories. Twenty-two per cent of the artists reported being at risk of injury through falling from stepladders, platforms or the like. These risks are seen as more pronounced in the categories of theatre and art & design.

Sickness and injury at work

- Sickness presence among artists has increased by 5 to 9 percentage points in comparison with previous studies by the Arts Grants Committee.
- Work-related injury has also increased between 2008 and 2016, from 11 to 30 per cent.

The survey included one question about sickness over the past year and another as to whether the artist had worked despite being sick. The proportion of artists who said they had worked despite being sick has increased between 2008 and 2016, from 46 to 55 per cent. In addition, a number of artists reported sickness presence but did not choose this response *every time* in the survey. That figure has increased from 31 per cent to 36 per cent.

A comparison between the two studies shows that the number of artists who stated that they had been sick during the previous year increased from 39 per cent in 2008 to 61 per cent in 2016, which represents an increase of 22 percentage points. Artists in the theatre category show the lowest proportion of sickness over the past 12 months while at the same time reporting a comparatively high rate of sickness presence, together with the dance and music categories.

Once again, work-related injury is most frequent in the dance category and has increased from 33 per cent to 47 per cent, followed by the theatre category, where such injury increased from 16 per cent to 36 per cent.

Bodily ailments

- Difficulties in the form of aches and pains in various parts of the body, including the back and feet, affects 17–29 per cent of artists.

Overall, work-related bodily ailments are less widespread in the artist group than in the labour market as a whole, being between 2 and 8 percentage points lower in respect of the various issues in this section. The dance category is an exception, however, with a higher reported rate of pain in the hips, legs, knees and feet than both the working-age population as a whole and the other artistic categories.

Psychosocial ailments

- The artist group performs at a lower level than the labour market as a whole in respect of all comparative issues, with one exception: 30 per cent of the artists feel dissatisfied with their input at the end of the day's work. The corresponding figure for the labour market as a whole is 23 per cent.

The responses to questions concerning psychosocial ailments show that the artist group is in a better position than the labour market as a whole, according to the official statistics in this connection. On one issue, the problems appear to be more extensive in the artist group than in the labour market and this concerns a feeling at the end of the day that one's work input has been inadequate. This feeling is most pronounced in the art & design, writing and film categories. On the other hand, the artist group is much less reluctant to go to work: 12 per cent compared with 21 per cent for the labour market.

The question in the Art Grants committee's study concerning the use of tranquilizers or alcohol to unwind is not included in the Work Environment Authority survey. In all, 17 per cent of the artists stated that they had taken tranquilizers or alcohol to unwind once a week or more frequently. This was more common in the music and art & design categories (21 and 20 per cent respectively) and significantly more widespread among male artists (22 per cent) than among female artists (14).

Open response

In conclusion, the survey gave artists the opportunity to develop their views on their working environment in the form of open responses. In all, some 500 responses were analysed qualitatively and summarised on the basis of one or two common themes. The professional artist's flexible occupational role and approach was one such theme that concerned the basic conditions experienced by many artists with different employers, different roles to play and geographic mobility in their work. Flexibility comes at the expense of continuity, respondents noted, with

short terms of employment and short-term financial benefit. Artists' flexible approach to work also has major implications for the physical working environment, a fact that was noted by many respondents. Also mentioned are a lack of premises in general and of suitable premises in particular, issues of daily hygiene, working on trains and in hotels and cafés, and comments about the impact of flexibility on family life and health.

Artists' financial situation is another important topic and is one that the Arts Grants Committee has monitored and reported on in other contexts. The word 'finances' occurs on 166 occasions in the open responses in association with words like worry, stress, uncertainty and deep anxiety. In general, these financial issues reflect the difficult economic situation that many artists experience and how this increases their workload in various respects.

The Swedish Arts Grants Committee is a government agency responsible to the Ministry of Culture. The Committee's primary function is to promote opportunities for artists to develop their art, to further artistic development, and to support innovative contemporary culture. The agency is also charged with analysing and disseminating information about artists' economic and social conditions and with monitoring the welfare system and its application in relation to professional artistic activities.

