



## Testimonies from Bectu survey Feb 2023 – audience behaviour in theatres

Whilst working in theatre venues on the West End in London I have been punched, hit across the face, verbally abused with phrases such as 'bitch' and 'f\*\*\*ing bastard'.

I have been hit, kicked, spat at, sworn at, had insults relating to my sexual preferences.

I have worked in retail and dealt with shop lifters and got less abuse and even worked in football stadiums as security and got less abuse.

I have been personally threatened with assault and sexual assault by a patron while working as a supervisor, I felt so unsafe, I had to leave early and get a taxi home.

A male patron was angry that he was being held for our latecomers point, and had me (a small woman) backed against the wall and shouting at me. Security had to intervene.

Police called after violent man broke one of the doors, I was scared and had a panic attack, no support offered by management after this.

I am due in court as a witness to a mass brawl that occurred last year in one of our venues. Patrons attacked our security team which led to police cars and riot vans attending the venue. This has had a severe impact on my and my team's mental health.

People ejected for drug use, throwing pedestrian barriers through the main foyer glass doors. One audience member punching several windows through after being ejected for being drunk. Ten people having a full on 20 minute brawl with security in a racially motivated attack.

Customers have urinated on the sides of bars and generators. Customers have touched me and my colleagues inappropriately, harassed, yelled, insulted and sexually harassed us. I have been grabbed and pushed and pulled around and have seen customers physically assault other staff and the audience member not being removed from site.

I have witnessed and experienced racial and sexual harassment, drinks poured on other audience members, physical assault from schoolchildren, chairs have been urinated on, parts of the building have been broken/bits of set stolen.

I feel less safe now than before the pandemic, finding people more extreme and violent. I have thought many times about dropping my career in theatre because of the effect on my mental health.

I have staff who are so scared of the customers they will only work behind the bar so there is a physical barrier between them and the customers. I've been threatened and abused personally. It's horrendous, and I am considering leaving the profession because of it.

During incidents at work I find myself planning how I would escape or where I would hide (ideally behind a locked door) if I couldn't get to a safe distance.

Patrons have threatened me to wait for me at the end of the show when I finish my shift.

I have been filmed by audience members, threatened and screamed at. Verbally abused on countless occasions.

We remove on average 2 people from a performance for drunken and disorderly behaviour every performance.

I've seen audience members punch other members of the public when they've asked them to be quiet, being sick on themselves, and being aggressive towards FOH staff. I now feel very unsafe doing my job and actively try and avoid taking jobs on musicals that will attract this sort of behaviour.

My colleague, whilst closing the bar in time for the show to start, was told by a patron 'If my wife wasn't here I would batter you' because the bar was closed. My supervisor was once told that she needed to 'get her pussy popped' because she was giving a warning to a patron

I have witnessed a member of audience threatening a member of staff saying 'I will wait for you outside'.

Multiple men (members of audience) touched my face and told me to 'smile more'

My colleague got punched in the back of her leg, whilst trying to assist a drunk person with getting out of their seat. She was then threatened and almost choked.

I have witnessed many events that have had an extremely negative impact on my mental health, and have lead to me suffering panic attacks whilst mixing at the sound desk, as I have felt increasingly unsafe in my working environment. I have seen a lot of audience members become incredibly aggressive and in some instances violent. As a woman this makes me feel particularly unsafe when the majority of the violent behaviour is from men.

I had many meetings with the producers and theatre management to discuss how unsafe I felt, and I couldn't help but feel if this had happened to a cast member then more action would have been taken.

A person once ripped the toilet stall door off its hinges, while one of my coworkers was inside, because it was locked. He didn't apologise but ran away and we spent the rest of the performance trying to track him down.

There is not enough interest in protecting staff in immersive theatre. Repeat offenders are allowed to return, people are allowed to insult and assault us with nothing more than a warning. Myself and colleagues have spoken about this and we've heard explanations such as "There's not enough evidence" "We've spoken to them and hopefully they won't do it again." and even "We don't need bad reviews at the moment."

Why am I putting my safety on the line for the amount I'm being paid? I've been paid £8.86 to put up with this behaviour at least and £11.05 at most. When audience members complain on social media about FOH staff not doing enough I wish I could explain to them the impact that trying to combat and handle this behaviour has on my mental health and how I'm not being paid enough to deal with it all. I am not a punching bag. I am a person.

I had a male patron come looking for me threatening violence after the performance ended as me ushering to keep the performers safe "ruined his experience".

I have experienced a threat against me or witnessed a violent event at every venue I've worked at.

Audiences fighting with each other, shouting abuse, throwing drinks & spitting on ushers, vomiting on people, urinating in the auditorium, throwing sweets, loud singing during shows, playing games on laptops, once an audience member assaulted by drunk women when singing along close to where I was operating the lights (made national press).

On the lower end are the most common issues, such as a near universal attitude of entitlement from audiences, who can be rude, abusive or condescending to staff. This happens every day. On the higher end, audiences are often drunk to the point of vomiting, yelling or singing. This happens relatively often, especially at musicals, though not exclusively. Every job I've worked has seen every few months or so an incident where security are required to evict a patron.

The audience stormed the stage, were highly intoxicated, rude and aggressive to foh staff to the point where one member of staff had someone spit in their face. The theatre this happened in is a heritage venue and chairs were broken, some of the plaster was damaged. Staff had to take time off due the impact on their mental health.

