Mind-Craft: What shapes the mental health of UK film and television workers?

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Executive summary

This report presents new and important findings about the factors shaping the mental health (good or poor) of film and TV workers.

The model described in this report finds that in 2021 the top six factors associated with the mental health of film and TV workers were:

- 1. Loneliness
- 2. Career Development
- 3. Workplace Culture and Communication
- 4. Struggling Financially
- 5. Impact of Covid
- 6. Work-life Balance

Of the above, loneliness stood out, having three times the impact on mental health as the second most important factor.

In addition, there were four further factors and thirteen distinct variables that had significant associations with mental wellbeing. These are detailed in the body of this report.

The model is based on the responses to our Looking Glass 21 survey¹ and explains 44% of the variation in mental health of film and TV workers. This suggests that there are other factors not measured by Looking Glass 21 (for example, factors not directly to do with the workplace) that also have significant influences on mental health. The findings indicate priorities for future workplace mental health interventions. For example, the Charity's Whole Picture Toolkit, currently being rolled out with industry partners, addresses recruitment, workplace culture and communication and work-life balance. But in seeking to improve the mental health and wellbeing of film and TV workers, the report suggests additional areas of attention such as loneliness, career development, diversity and financial security.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Findings of our Looking Glass surveys

In early 2022, the Film and TV Charity published the results of our 2021 Looking Glass survey of the mental health of film and television workers. As with the first survey in 2019, Looking Glass '21 found that the industry's mental wellbeing score (19.3 on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale)² was significantly below the national average of 23.6 out of a possible total of 35. The survey highlighted a range of issues affecting the mental health of the industry's workforce:



Long working hours, with **1 in 6** working 60+ hours per week.



Persistent reports of bullying, racism and harassment, with more than half of respondents having been the target of unacceptable behaviours in the past year.



Most respondents did not feel that the industry was a mentally healthy place to work, with **4 in 10** saying they would not report a mental health problem.



Two-thirds of respondents thought about leaving the industry during the past year due to mental health concerns.



Half of respondents felt that there needed to be stronger line management.

Since the publication of Looking Glass '21, we have looked further at the issue of people leaving the industry prematurely (the 'leaky pipeline') and have estimated that the industry would need **35,000 more people aged 50+** to give it an age profile similar to that of the whole UK workforce³.

In its 2022 Skills Review, the BFI argued that improved retention is an important part of reaching the 2025 target of 21,000 more film and TV workers needed to meet expanding production requirements⁴. Improving retention means improving industry culture, economic security and work-life balance for film and TV workers.

²See Annex 1 for a description of this scale, which runs from 7 to 35.

^ahttps://filmtvcharity.org.uk/news-event/absent-friends-report/

⁴ https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/reports/bfi-skills-review-2022

On the positive side, one third of those who responded to Looking Glass '21 reported that their mental health was 'good' or 'very good' and respondents were generally optimistic that things would get better as a result of increased discussion of mental health in society and increasing openness in the industry.

While there is a way to go, this optimism has been reflected in enthusiastic take-up during 2022 of the Charity's Whole Picture Programme Toolkit,⁵ with many productions agreeing that change needs to happen and looking for ways to have a positive impact on the mental health of their staff and freelancers.

1.2 Digging deeper

Looking Glass '21 highlighted the issues that need addressing, but there was much more information in the survey results than we were able to analyse earlier this year. For this reason, we contracted a specialist statistical agency, **Select Statistics**,⁶ to use the responses to that survey to model the mental health of film and TV workers. The aim of the model is to identify the key influences on mental health and the strength of their effects. Because respondents' mental health ranged from 'very good' to 'very poor', it is possible to model the responses to see which factors in people's working lives are most strongly associated with better or worse mental health outcomes.

1.3 Why a model?

There are two basic reasons for creating a model:

- A model shows the *strength and ranking* of the factors that influence the mental health of film and TV workers.
- A model captures as much of the information as possible from the Looking Glass '21 survey responses.

On the latter point, Looking Glass 21' had 59 questions, each with up to 12 sub-questions offering up to five possible answers to each question. There are so many statistical relationships in this dataset that we would never be able to report more than a small fraction of them. A model uses proven multi-variable statistical techniques to extract and make available much of the information contained in the dataset.

Section 2 of this report sets out the findings and Section 3 explores the factors in greater depth. For readers interested in the technical details, the model is described in Annex 2.

2. The findings: the factors that shape the mental health of film and TV workers

In the Looking Glass survey, mental health is measured by the respondents' scores on the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).⁷

The model finds the associations between SWEMWBS scores and the answers to the rest of the questions in the survey and identifies the strongest effects. The top six factors associated with mental health were found to be:

Factor	Association (+/-)
1. The UCLA loneliness score	(Negative)
2. Good Career Development	(Positive)
3. Good workplace Culture and Communication	(Positive)
4. Struggling Financially	(Negative)
5. Positive experience with Covid protocols/working practices	(Positive) [®]
6. Good work-life Balance	(Positive)

Of these, loneliness has **three times the effect** of the second most significant factor.

The other significant factors were:

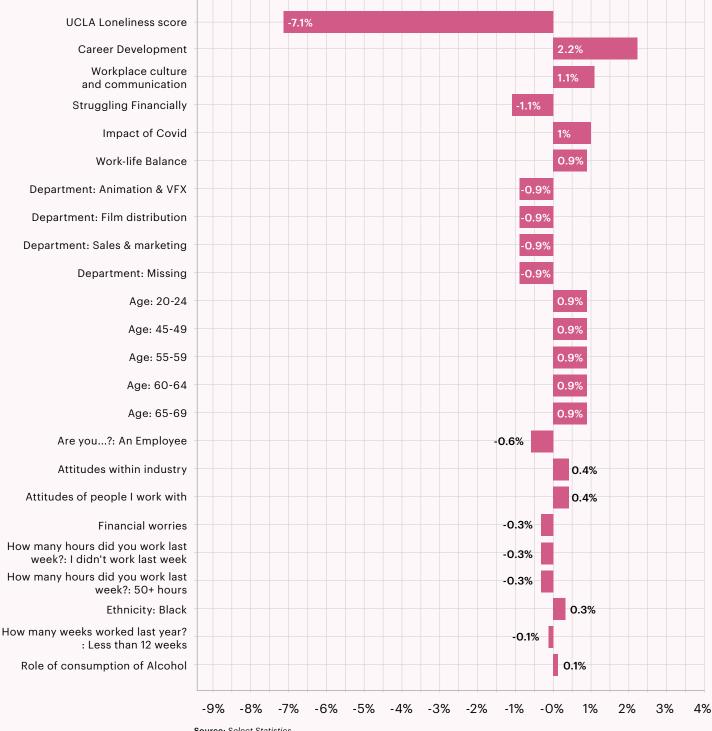
7. Positive industry attitudes to mental wellbeing	(Positive)
8. Positive colleague attitudes to mental wellbeing	(Positive)
9. Worrying about finances	(Negative)
10. Consuming alcohol being a significant part of the work culture	(Positive)

⁷See Annex 1.

^a Substantially more respondents reported negative impacts from working under Covid protocols than positive impacts, but where the experience was positive, it had a positive association with mental wellbeing.

In addition to these factors, thirteen individual questions were found to have statistically significant relationships with the mental health of film and TV workers.⁹

The infographic summarises the results:



Percentage point contribution to Mental Wellbeing

Source: Select Statistics

Note to the infographic: The percentage points shown are the amount that the explanatory power of the model changes when the variable in question is removed from the model.

Overall, the model explains slightly under half the variation in mental health of film and TV workers.

In interpreting the results, it is important to bear this in mind. Looking Glass was focused primarily on work-related issues affecting mental health, but there are issues outside work that may be equally or more important for a particular individual, for example genetic pre-disposition, trauma or family relationships.

So, our model should be interpreted as a partial view of the overall mental health of film and TV workers. Its distinctiveness is its focus on work-related factors which the Charity can influence and for which the industry has ultimate responsibility.

3. Understanding the factors

To understand the factors identified in the model, we need to know which Looking Glass questions contribute to each of them. In the following section, we set out the questions contributing to each of the top six factors.

3.1 Loneliness

The fact that loneliness came top by a considerable margin is an important finding. The loneliness questions are from the UCLA Loneliness Scale¹⁰ and address loneliness in a whole-life sense:

How often do you feel that you lack companionship?

How often do you feel left out?

How often do you feel isolated from others?

For each question, respondents choose one of three answers:

- Hardly ever
- Some of the time
- Often

So, the responses extend beyond what people are experiencing in the workplace.

Loneliness is an emotional state distinct from isolation. Loneliness has been defined as the gap between a person's desired levels of social contact and their actual level of social contact, whereas isolation is an objective measure of the number of social contacts people have.¹¹

The remedy for loneliness involves improved *quality of relationships*, not simply additional social contacts.

3.2 Career Development

The 'Career Development' factor combined the answers to the following questions:

To what degree do the following things impact on your mental wellbeing at work? Please think about your current or most recent work:¹²

Networking and relationship development

Access to career development opportunities

Income and earnings"

This factor therefore combines networking with access to work opportunities (which are affected by the inclusiveness of the industry and attitudes of gatekeepers) and money. Career development is experienced by respondents as having a financial side as well as a human side.

3.3 Workplace culture and communication

The factor 'Workplace Culture and Communication' combines the answers to six questions. It was found statistically that the answers to these questions contain the impact of bullying, racism and harassment, i.e. that bullying, racism and harassment coincide with poor working culture, rather than being standalone entities.¹³

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/lonelinessresearch-and-resources/ loneliness-isolation-understanding-thedifference-why-it-matters/

² With responses on a five-point Likert scale: very negative impact – somewhat negative impact – no impact – somewhat positive impact – very positive impact.

¹³ When tested separately, bullying, racism and harassment had significant negative relationships with mental wellbeing. However, in the multi-factor model, bullying, racism and harassment were absorbed mainly into the 'workplace culture and communication' factor.

The questions are:

To what degree do the following things impact your mental wellbeing at work? Please think about your current or most recent work:¹⁴

Internal communications Feedback mechanisms Culture and values Treatment of others Support provision

Views on mental wellbeing"

This factor combines a range of workplace cultural behaviours, from how firms communicate, to how they treat people and/or allow people to be treated by others, to whether people in difficulty are supported. The model tells us that where these things are done well, they have a positive impact on the mental health of the workforce involved.

3.4 Struggling Financially

The factor 'Struggling Financially' combines the answers to six questions:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about managing your finances?¹⁵

Late payments for completed work are making it harder for me to manage my money

Uncertainty about future income often makes me worried

I sometimes have to take work outside the industry to make ends meet

I feel I should always be available to take on extra work"

And,

In the past year have you experienced the following? (yes/no)

Felt under increased pressure at work because I needed the money.

Taken on a job I wouldn't usually consider because I needed the money."

'Struggling financially' therefore captures several financial issues, from cashflow, to income uncertainty, to feeling compelled to take on any kind of work that comes along, all of which are recognisable aspects of freelancer working life.

¹⁴ With responses on the same five-point scale as for Career Development.

¹⁵ On a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree – somewhat disagree – neither

agree nor disagree – somewhat agree – strongly agree.

It should be noted that Looking Glass '21 survey was carried out in 2021 before the cost-of-living crisis began to develop, so the issues highlighted here may be even more important now (October 2022) than they were at the time people gave their responses.

3.5 Impact of Covid

Looking Glass '21 was conducted at a time when the industry was back at work but working under Covid protocols. The factor 'Impact of Covid' combines the answers to two questions:

What impact have changes to working practices made by the industry's response to the Covid pandemic had on your ability to do your job?

What impact has working in the industry under Covid safety protocols had on your mental health?"¹⁶

This factor therefore combines the impact on work of Covid working practices with respondents' assessment of the impact of the protocols on their mental health.

3.6 Work-life Balance

The factor 'Work-life balance' combines the answers to five questions:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Thinking about your current or most recent work)¹⁷

> I often find it difficult to fulfil my commitments outside of work because of the amount of time I spend on my job

Work doesn't stop me from making plans with friends and family

Work has a negative impact on my personal relationships

And,

To what degree do the following things impact your mental wellbeing at work?' Please think about your current or most recent work:¹⁸

Intensity of work

Control over my working hours."

This factor therefore combines aspects of the direct effect of work on mental health with an assessment of the extent to which work commitments disrupt normal social and family life.

¹⁶ These questions are answered on a three-point scale: positive impact – neither positive nor negative – negative impact.

¹⁷ On a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

¹⁸On a five-point scale from "very negative impact" to "very positive impact".

4. Conclusion

From the responses to our 2019 and 2021 Looking Glass surveys, we identified a range of issues that negatively affect the mental health of film and TV workers. These include the impact of bullying, racism and harassment, long working hours and poor attitudes to mental health. The latter, we noted, has begun to change as the industry and society engage more with the conversation around mental health.

The model described in this report takes the analysis a step further by identifying 'factors' that draw on multiple survey questions and sizing and ranking the factors that have the strongest associations, positive and negative, with mental health.

The top six factors which emerged were:

- 1. Loneliness (by a wide margin)
- 2. Career Development
- 3. Workplace Culture and Communication
- 4. Struggling Financially
- 5. Impact of Covid
- 6. Work-life Balance

These factors suggest priorities for future mental health interventions. For example, loneliness is a factor that relates to life outside work as well as in the workplace, but we need to consider what more can be done in the workplace and professional life to assist people develop meaningful friendships, relationships and sense of belonging. People who are not lonely will be happier and more productive as well as achieving higher levels of wellbeing.

The model supports the emphasis of the Charity's Whole Picture Toolkit, currently being rolled out with industry partners, on diverse recruitment, workplace culture and communication and work-life balance. The Charity addresses financial needs through our grants programme, but there may be more we can do to address the issues highlighted by the model's 'struggling financially' factor. For the industry, the model supports the approach of those firms and productions that have established positive working cultures and proactive approaches to the mental health of their staff and crew/freelancers. The report supports those who are in the process of change, for example by adopting initiatives such as those set out in our Whole Picture Toolkit. The report challenges those who have not yet begun the process of change to do so.

We look forward to discussing these findings with industry and public sector partners and working together on changes in working practice that will improve the job satisfaction and mental wellbeing of the film and TV workforce.

Acknowledgements

We thank Jo Morrison of Select Statistics for the statistical modelling this report is based on. A full copy of Jo's report to the Charity can be found at

https://25788730.fs1.hubspotusercontent-eu1.net/hubfs/25788730/ FILM001%20Report%20final%20with%20Exec%20Summary.pdf.

Report text: David Steele, Research and Insight Manager, Film and TV Charity, with contributions from Jo Morrison (Select Statistics), Rupert Jones-Lee and Charity teams involved in design and delivery of services and programmes.

Annex 1: The Looking Glass survey questions on mental health and loneliness

A1.1 Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (SWEMWB) scale

The Looking Glass survey measures mental health in two ways: (1) by asking respondents to rate their mental health on the scale Very Poor, Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, and (2) by asking the seven questions of the SWEMWB scale. The answers to (1) and (2) are strongly correlated. In the mental health model, we use the SWEMWB score as the dependent variable.

To arrive at the SWEMWB score, respondents are asked to rate themselves against the following statements:

I've been feeling optimistic about the future	I've been thinking clearly	
I've been feeling useful	I've been feeling close to other people	
I've been feeling relaxed	I've been able to make up	
I've been dealing with problems well	my own mind about things	

For each of the statements, respondents are asked to pick one of the following numbers:

- 1. None of the time4. Often
- 2. Rarely

5. All of the time

3. Some of the time

To arrive at the SWEMWB score, the seven numbers are summed to produce a raw score for each respondent, then transformed into metric scores using the SWEMWBS conversion table. The final scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating higher positive mental wellbeing.

More information on the SWEMWB scale, metric conversion and the UK population statistics for SWEMWBS can be found at the following link:

https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/short-warwick-edinburgh-mental-wellbeing-scale-swemws/

A1.2 The UCLA Loneliness Scale

The 20-question version of the UCLA scale was first published in 1978 and has since achieved widespread recognition.¹⁹ Shorter versions of the scale have been developed. We use the three-question version:

Q1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?

Q2. How often do you feel left out?

Q3. How often do you feel isolated from others?

For each question, respondents choose one of three answers:

- Hardly ever
- Some of the time
- Often

The answers are scored from 1 to 3, giving a total range from 3 to 9, with higher scores indicating a higher degree of loneliness.

Experts in the field distinguish between loneliness and isolation. Loneliness has been defined as a subjective feeling about the gap between a person's desired levels of social contact and their actual level of social contact, whereas isolation is an objective measure of the number of social contacts people have.²⁰

Although one of the UCLA questions mentions 'isolation', the three questions are primarily about people's feelings in relation to their level of social contact, so address loneliness rather than isolation. The remedy for loneliness involves improved quality of relationships, not simply additional social contacts.

In the Select Statistics model, the finding that, of the variables measured, the UCLA loneliness score has the strongest single influence on the mental health of film and TV workers is not therefore a statement about isolation, but a statement about the mental health impact of the emotional state of loneliness.

¹⁹ For example, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2394670/

¹⁰ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/lonelinessresearch-and-resources/ loneliness-isolation-understanding-the-

difference-why-it-matters/

Annex 2: The statistical model

Key features of a statistical model are that (1) it should explain as much of the variation in individuals' mental health as possible, and (2) it should be economic, that is, achieve its explanatory power with as few variables as possible. The modelling process involves reducing the number of variables while experimenting to find the model that has the strongest explanatory power.

A2.1 Measuring the mental health of film and TV workers

The 'dependent variable' in the model is the thing we are interested in finding out more about. In this case, it is the mental health of film and TV workers, which is measured by a set of seven questions, known as the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). These seven questions²¹ ask people about how they are feeling at the time of the survey. SWEMWBS has been developed and validated over many years and is regarded as a reliable way of assessing mental health. The range of SWEMWB scores for the UK population is known,²² so we can compare the mental health of film and TV workers with a benchmark for the whole UK population.

A2.2 The aim of the model

The aim of the model is to relate the outcome of interest (the mental health of film and TV workers) to several explanatory variables,²³ arriving at an equation in the following form:

The mental health of film and TV workers (their SWEMWB score) = an underlying average SWEMWB score, plus \mathbf{x} amount of Variable One, \mathbf{y} amount of Variable Two, \mathbf{z} amount of Variable Three, and so on.

The modeller needs to find out which variables should be included in the model – those with significant impact - and the size of x, y, and z for all the variables in the model.

An example of model-making is weather forecasting: meteorologists take many measurements of atmospheric conditions over a wide area then feed these measurements into a computer model. The model arrives at a forecast based on how the weather behaved on previous occasions when similar atmospheric conditions prevailed. Similarly, our model predicts the mental health of a film or TV worker based on the strength of the factors affecting that particular person.

²¹See Annex 1 for the questions.

²² https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/ howto/wemwbs_population_norms_in_health_survey_for_england_ data_2011.pdf

²³ A "variable" in a model is something which affects the participants but varies from person to person. For example, one person might work 40 hours per week, another 60 hours per week, so "hours worked" is a variable that could be included in the model.

A2.3 Factor Analysis

The first step in developing our model was Factor Analysis, which is a way of grouping the answers to different questions by discovering the underlying relationships among them. A factor is an underlying entity that causes respondents to answer the same questions in relatively similar ways. Once the statistician identifies the factor, the factor is given a name reflecting what it is. The advantage of using factors is that they enable the model to include a large amount of information from the survey responses, without crowding the model and making it hard to interpret.

In our model, Select Statistics identified **thirteen factors**, combining the answers to **forty-two** Looking Glass questions.

A2.4 Answers to individual questions

As well as identifying Factors, individual Looking Glass questions were tested for their impact on the mental health of film and TV workers. Where these proved to be significant, they were included in the model.

A2.5 Estimating the size of the effects

Which factors and questions were significantly associated with mental wellbeing, as measured by the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (SWEMWB) scale, and the size of their effects, were measured using multiple regression, which is a standard statistical method for isolating the effects of individual variables in a multi-variable setting. Factors and questions that had no significant relationship with the SWEMWB score were dropped. In the final model, **ten** factors and **thirteen** individual questions were found to have significant associations with the SWEMWB score.

The top six factors were:

Factor	Association (+/-)
1. The UCLA loneliness score	(Negative)
2. Good Career Development	(Positive)
3. Good workplace Culture and Communication	(Positive)
4. Struggling Financially	(Negative)
5. Positive experience with Covid protocols/working practices	(Positive) ²⁴
6. Good work-life Balance	(Positive)

²⁴ Substantially more respondents reported negative impacts from working under Covid protocols than positive impacts, but where the experience was positive, it had a significant positive association with mental wellbeing.

The other significant factors were:

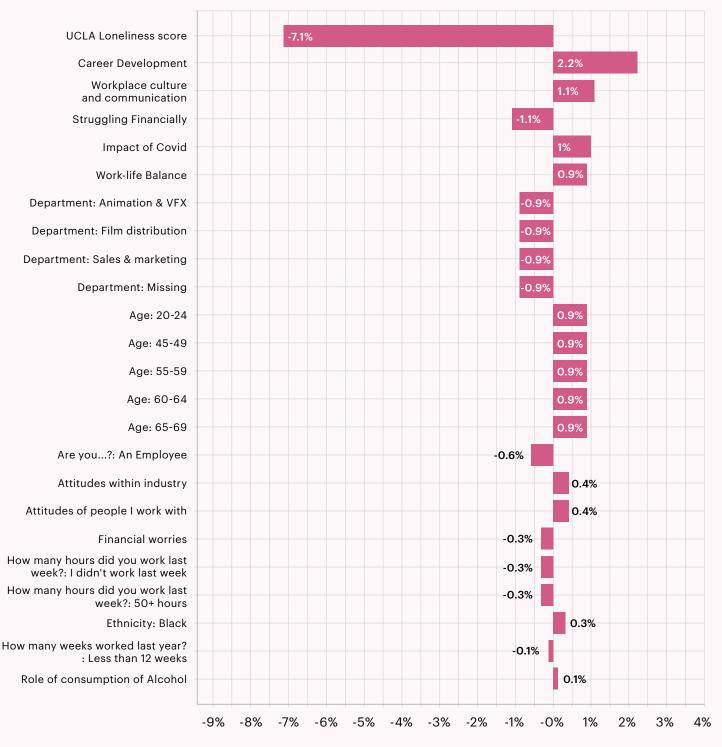
7. Positive industry attitudes to mental wellbeing	(Positive)
8. Positive colleague attitudes to mental wellbeing	(Positive)
9. Worrying about finances	(Negative)
10. Consuming alcohol being a significant part of the work culture	(Positive)

Thirteen individual questions were found to have statistically significant relationships with the mental health of film and TV workers. The most significant of these were:

Individual Question	Influence
Working in Animation and VFX, Film Distribution or Sales & Marketing, compared with working in Content Creation	(Negative)
Being aged 20-24, 45-49 or between the ages of 55 and 69, compared with being aged 30-34	(Positive)
Being an employee rather than freelancer	(Negative) ²⁵
Not working last week	(Negative)
Working more than 50 hours last week	(Negative)
Being Black, compared with being White	(Positive) ²⁶
Working less than 12 weeks in the last year	(Negative)

²⁵ This result should be interpreted with caution. It means that holding all other variables constant, there was a slight negative mental health association from being an employee. However, the average SWEMWB score of employees was slightly higher (19.6) than that of freelancers (19.2). This suggests that certain aspects of being a freelancer rather than an employee were reflected more strongly in other variables in the model.

²⁰ Black respondents to Looking Glass 21 had better mental health than white and Asian respondents. However, the sample size was small (n = 45), so this result should not be over-interpreted.



Percentage point contribution to Mental Health

Source: Select Statistics

Technical notes to the infographic: (1) The percentage points shown are the amount that the explanatory power of the model changes when the variable in question is removed from the model. These are shown as positive or negative according to the associations shown in section A2.5. (2) The table of coefficients for the model can be found in the full report by Select Statistics.

A2.6 Counter-intuitive findings

Two of the above findings may strike some readers as counter-intuitive: that being Black as opposed to white is associated with better mental health and that being an employee as opposed to freelance is associated with worse mental health. The effects are relatively small, but they do emerge from the model. In the case of Black respondents, the sample size (n=45) may be part of the answer. We may simply have a respondent group with better than average mental health. On the other hand, it is statistically possible that Black people in the industry have better mental health than white people. We will need to see whether this result is repeated in future Looking Glass surveys.

Analysis of the employee finding is slightly different in that in a simple correlation analysis, freelancers have worse mental health on average than employees. However, in the multi-variable model, being an employee emerges as a negative influence. The interpretation of this, we believe, is that aspects of freelance working life are more strongly reflected in the top factors in the model, leaving a small residual negative effect for being an employee.

A2.7 What does the model say about causation?

Strictly speaking, a statistical model indicates association rather than causation. But if there are theoretical reasons or qualitative evidence that a variable causes an outcome rather than the outcome causing the variable, it may be possible to speak of causation. For example, in Looking Glass '21 it is more likely that poor industry practice causes poor film and TV mental health than that poor film and TV mental health causes poor industry practice.²⁷

A2.8 How much does the model explain?

Overall, the model described in this report explains 44%²⁸ of the difference in mental health scores among film and TV workers. In simple terms this means that slightly under half of the mental health status of film and TV workers is attributable to things that we measured in Looking Glass '21, whereas slightly more than half (56%) is down to other things (e.g. non-work-related factors) that we did not explore in Looking Glass '21.

In interpreting the results, it is important to bear this in mind. Looking Glass was focused primarily on work-related issues affecting mental health, but there are issues outside work that may be equally or more important for a particular individual, for example genetic pre-disposition, trauma or family relationships.

 ²⁷ Which does not mean that the opposite should not be considered. For example, poor mental health among some people in authority could be a driver of poor working culture.
²⁸ In statistical language, R2 = 0.44. In the infographic, the size of the effects is their contribution to the explanatory power of the model. For example, if loneliness were to be excluded from the model, the proportion of the difference in mental health scores explained by the model would drop from 44% to 36.9% (a decrease of 7.1 percentage points).

So, our model should be interpreted as a partial view of the overall mental health of film and TV workers. Its distinctiveness is its focus on work-related factors which the Charity can influence and for which the industry has ultimate responsibility.

The full report on the model by Select Statistics can be found at https://25788730.fs1.hubspotusercontent-eu1.net/hubfs/25788730/ FILM001%20Report%20final%20with%20Exec%20Summary.pdf.