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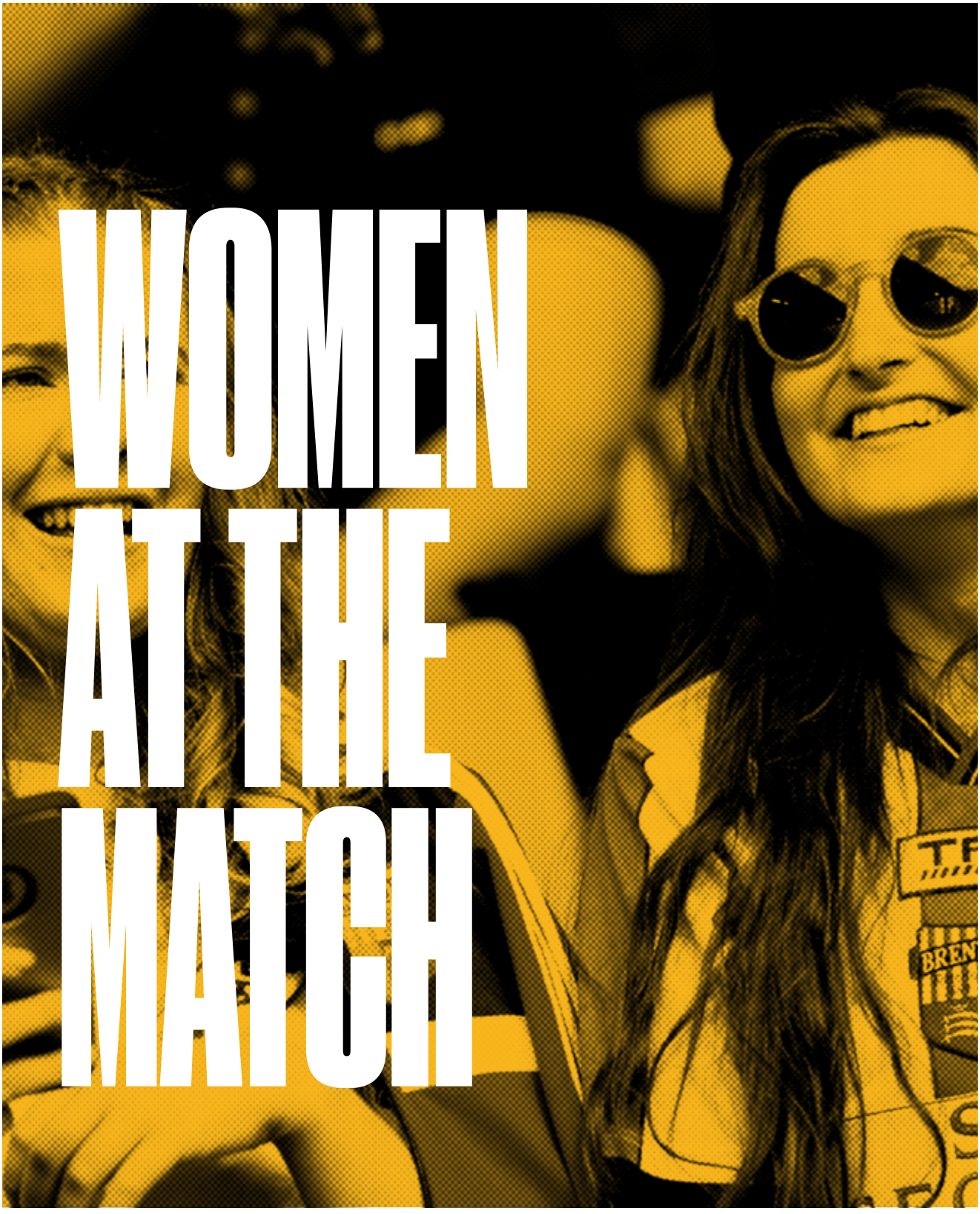

WOMEN AT THE MATCH

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the report on the Women at the Match survey, conducted by the Football Supporters' Association. This builds on the work of our previous survey in 2014, and you can find a downloadable pdf of that report at **bit.ly/women-at-the-match**

Our initial survey was the first of its kind, and gives us a baseline against which we can compare the experiences of women attending football in 2021. It's a world that, thanks to the #MeToo movement and so much else, looks remarkably different just seven years on.

We asked for the opinions and experiences of thousands of women football fans, not only of the men's game but also for the first time asking fans of the women's game.

We sought their views on a range of issues from how they began following football through to the factors that influence their attendance, and their experiences of sexism at the game. Over the following pages we present our findings.

WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY?

The survey ran online from 13th August to 7th September 2021, gathering data from 2,164 supporters of both the men's and women's games.

97.2% of respondents identified as women, 0.6% identified as non-binary, the remainder either self-identified as another gender, or preferred not to reveal their gender.

There was a roughly even split on age grounds:

13% 25 and under
18% between 26 to 35
19% between 36 to 45
20% between 46 to 55
18% 56 to 65
10% over 65

The majority of the respondents were matchgoing football fans.

Of those who said they followed a club in the men's game, 61% were season ticket holders, and 81% attended at least five games a season before COVID. 73% attended at least one away game a season.

Of those who said they support a women's team, 16% were season ticket holders, and 74% attended matches regularly pre-COVID.

FAN BACKGROUNDS

One of the reasons for our original 2014 survey was an interest in finding out how women got involved in following football - who they attended with, how old they were when they caught the matchgoing bug, and why they started supporting the teams they did.

Following up on that work seven years later has reaffirmed much of what we found out in our original research, at least in the men's game, putting paid to myths or stereotypes that surround womens' attendance at football.

The biggest driver of attendance at football is family - parents and other family members account for more than 70% of women's first matchgoing experiences.

The idea that women are all being 'dragged along' by their partners can be safely quashed, with less than one in 10 reporting that they attended with their partners initially. Although having a shared interest is clearly useful, as one in four fans report that they attend with their partners today.

Women continue to report that football is a lifelong love affair - two-thirds had attended their first games by the age of 15, with only one in 10 coming to the game for the first time over the age of 21.

When comparing these figures with the women's game, however, there are some interesting differences.

The proportion of women experiencing live women's matches before the age of 16 is half of that seen in the men's game.

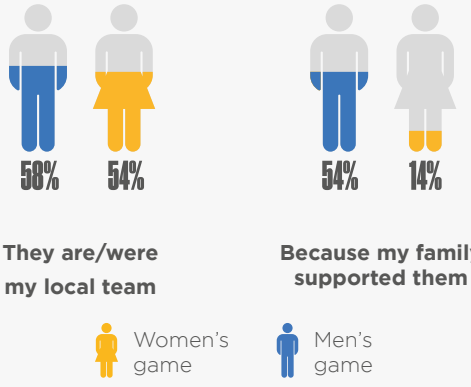
The majority of our respondents (86%) who said they were fans of women's teams also indicated support for a men's team, which may account for the reason fans are 'finding' women's football at a different stage of their lives, having already fallen in love with the men's game as children.

It will be interesting to see if this effect shifts in future years, as a new generation of girls start to attend with their parents who have become later converts to the women's game.

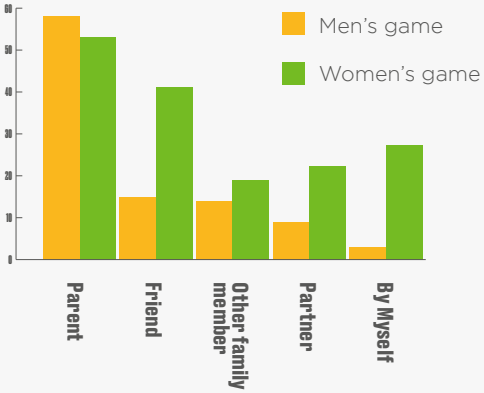
STAT: Half of fans attending their first women's games are doing so as adults (48%) compared with just 11% in the men's game.

STAT: Women are more than five times more likely to have started going to women's football on their own than they are in the men's game.

Why did you start supporting your team?



Who did you first go to watch your team with?



CHANGING ATTITUDES

FANS MORE WILLING TO REPORT SEXISM

The Women at the Match survey shows us how attitudes towards sexist behaviour have changed, with women less accepting of sexist behaviour than they were before. The proportion of women who are willing to laugh off or accept sexist behaviour at the match has more than halved.

Half of the respondents (49%) also told us that witnessing sexist behaviour made them angry, up from one in three (29%) previously, and almost a quarter (24%) find witnessing sexist behaviour upsetting, an increase on the 13% who said the same in 2014.

How does it make you feel to witness something sexist at the match?

I'm generally not bothered

was 32% | now 15%

I usually laugh it off

was 24% | now 12%

It's part of the matchday experience

was 10% | now 4%

Reports of sexist behaviours have also increased compared with 2014's figures.

Which have you experienced at a match?

Heard sexist comments

was 23% | now 34%

Been told you know a lot for a girl/woman

was 34% | now 44%

Been told you only go because you fancy the players

was 20% | now 26%

Heard sexist chanting

was 18% | now 24%

When comparing this year's results with those of our previous survey in 2014, it is disappointing to note that reports of sexism and related issues are up across the board.

Only a third of fans (37%) say they haven't experienced or witnessed any sexist behaviour when attending a match in the men's game, down from more than half (52%) who reported trouble-free experiences back in 2014.

One in five women (20%) told the Women at the Match survey that they had experienced unwanted physical attention while attending men's football matches, which is more than double the proportion from our 2014 survey (8%).

ALLY SIMCOCK, FSA BOARD MEMBER AND PORT VALE FAN SAID OF THE RESULTS

"It is heartening to see the change in attitudes over recent years, with fans less likely to be accepting of sexist behaviour, or willing to just brush it off or excuse it as banter.

"I've been going to men's football for a number of years and have heard my share of sexist comments, but a lot has changed recently. Things like the #MeToo movement have helped change people's perceptions about what they're willing to put up with, and what is acceptable.

"The FSA is clear on this – there is no place whatsoever at football for sexist or misogynistic behaviour. We'd encourage all supporters to challenge it where they can, and if necessary, report it to their club or the authorities.

"Football should be a safe and welcoming environment for everyone."

THE WOMEN'S GAME

The figures from the women's game are more positive than in the men's in terms of fans' experiences of sexism, although we are unable to make direct comparison with 2014's survey as this was the first time we split up questions on experiences at the men's and women's game.

A much smaller proportion of fans report encountering sexist behaviour at women's football, with three-quarters (75%) saying they have not heard sexist comments or chants or experienced unwanted physical attention.

One in 20 fans (5%) at the women's game have experienced unwanted physical attention, with one in eight (13%) saying they had heard sexist comments.

There's also a difference in the perceptions and attitudes of fans attending women's football.

STAT: Tolerance for, or the expectation of, sexism at the women's game is lower than in the men's game, with fans more likely to be angry when they hear it (64%) or find it upsetting (34%) when it does happen.

They are also less accepting of it – just 2% say it's part of the matchday experience, and only 3% are willing to laugh it off.

CHALLENGING SEXISM

Having established that more fans are calling out sexist behaviour, it's equally important for us to know whether they have confidence in the game's institutions and have the support required to deal with complaints when they do arise.

From this, we can infer the areas that need improvement for fans to be more empowered tackling sexism, or to have confidence in action being taken.

Our results show that fans in the women's game are more likely to demand action be taken against sexist behaviour than their counterparts in the men's game, and are more likely to say that such instances should be reported.

What do you think should happen to people who behave in a sexist way at matches?

	Women's game	Men's game
They should be reported to a steward	57%	45%
They should face punishment (e.g. bans) from club	47%	33%
They should be ejected from the ground	39%	26%
They should be reported to the police	22%	11%

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Fans in both the men's and women's game told us they were in favour of self-policing; more than half said other fans should challenge sexist behaviour when it occurs.

There is a majority of support for clubs condemning the action of sexist fans, too, in both men's and women's football. The data suggests, however, that fans don't have the utmost confidence that clubs and stewards would deal with incidents on a matchday.

Of those women who told us they had experienced sexist behaviour at the match, more than half opted to ignore it, while around one-third of respondents told us that when they had heard something sexist at the match they had challenged it themselves.

Despite roughly half of fans telling us that perpetrators of sexist behaviour should be reported to stewards, only one in 10 fans experiencing it told us that they had actually reported sexist behaviour on a matchday, suggesting a lack of confidence that complaints will be dealt with.

CAN MY CLUB DEAL WITH SEXISM?

When problems occur on a matchday, there isn't overwhelming confidence that club employees are capable of dealing with it.

Half of fans in the men's game (49%) don't believe that stewards at their club understand sexism and would be capable of dealing with a complaint about it, as opposed to the one in three (32%) who do.

The situation is somewhat improved in the women's game, with a slim majority believing that their club employees would be able to deal with a sexism complaint (44%) but a significant minority don't share that confidence (40%).

STAT: Almost two-thirds (63%) of fans from the women's game think their club would take a report of sexism seriously. That figure drops to 57% in the men's game.

BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE

Despite the increase in women reporting negative experiences across the board in the men's game, it is not putting fans off from attending matches in large numbers, with one in 20 (5%) saying that witnessing sexist behaviour at the match makes them not want to attend in future.

In the women's game, experiencing sexist behaviour was more likely to deter future attendance, with 9% of fans saying it puts them off returning.

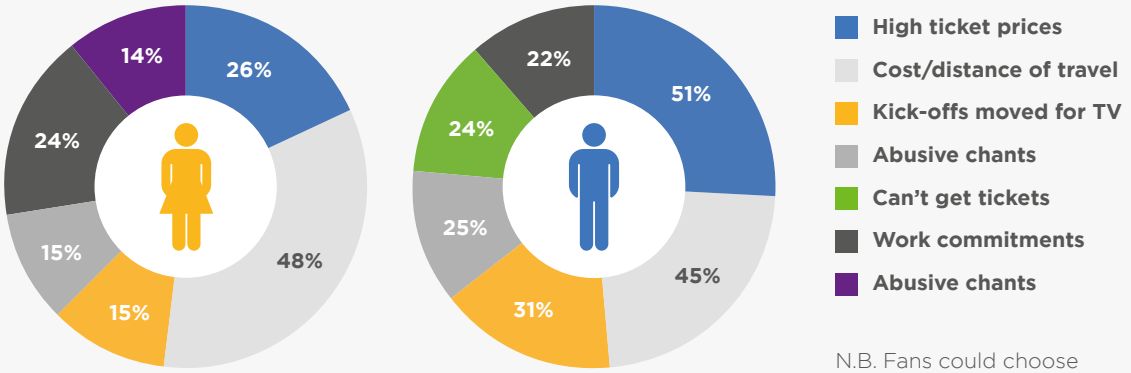
The biggest barriers to continued attendance at football remained cost and inconvenience – fans said that high ticket prices, the cost and distance of travel and kick-off times being moved for TV were most likely to discourage them from attending more games.

There was an increase, however, in other factors - one in four cited abusive chants as most likely to discourage them from attending, on a par with the lack of availability of tickets.

In the women's game, it's a similar picture, with cost/distance of travel a key factor in preventing greater attendance. The issue of ticket prices is not as stark as in the men's game, but it remains one of the biggest obstacles, alongside work commitments.

Notably TV rescheduling is not as much of an issue in the women's game compared with the men's game, although this was before the effects of the new TV deal with Sky Sports and the BBC had been felt in the 2021-22 season. This may change in future, and we will be keeping an eye on developments.

What is most likely to discourage you from attending more matches?



N.B. Fans could choose multiple factors when surveyed

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