

Harassment common for female GPs

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New research indicates the more than half of female GPs have been sexually harassed by patients. Credit: ThinkStock

More than half of Australian female GPs have experienced sexual harassment by patients - from inappropriate exposure of body parts to unwelcome touching - according to Monash University-led research.

In the study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Dr Peter Bratuskins of the Monash Department of General Practice, GP Dr Heather McGarry and Dr Stephen Wilkinson of Deakin University surveyed 180 female GPs from around the country.

More than 54 per cent of respondents reported an experience of [sexual harassment](#) by [patients](#), with 9.3 per cent being harassed more than eight times.

The harassment took a number of forms. Most commonly - in 64.9 per cent of cases - patients requested an inappropriate examination. Other experiences included inappropriate exposure of [body parts](#) (55.7 per cent); gender-based remarks (43.3 per cent); inappropriate gifts (42.3 per cent); sexual remarks (36.1 per cent); and touching or grabbing (30.9 per cent).

Two-thirds of GPs surveyed reported changing their behaviour or consulting style in response to sexual harassment, but only 6.7 per cent reported receiving training to help deal with such incidents.

Changes adopted by female GPs in response to harassment included using a more formal manner, altering or not performing examinations, and no longer working after hours or alone.

"Given the likely adverse effects of exposure to sexual harassment, greater dialogue is needed within the medical profession with research and action to increase awareness of the issues, develop specific training and support pathways to help prevent sexual harassment by patients and assist those clinicians who experience sexual harassment by patients," the authors wrote.

The researchers suggested that workplace training acknowledge the possibility of sexual harassment by patients and incorporate appropriate strategies to support female GPs.

More information: [www.mja.com.au/journal/2013/19 ... actioners-patients](http://www.mja.com.au/journal/2013/19...actioners-patients)

Provided by Monash University

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