

# Women are risking their lives by not taking part in bowel screening tests according to new research

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Credit: University of Glasgow

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A research team led by Professor Colin McCowan at the University of St Andrews and Dr. Katie Robb from the University of Glasgow found that while 81 percent of [women](#) took part in [cervical cancer screening](#) and 73 percent in [breast cancer](#) screening only 60 percent of women took part in [bowel screening](#).

According to Bowel Cancer UK bowel cancer is treatable and curable especially if diagnosed early.

In a study published in the *British Journal of Cancer* today (Wednesday 4 September 2019) the team analysed anonymised health records for over 430,000 women in the Glasgow area for each of the three screening programmes to examine which women did and did not take part. In particular they focussed on the 68,324 women who were eligible to take part in all three programmes.

They found that just over half of women took part in all three programmes but also that seven out of every hundred did not do any. Only 60 percent of women took part in bowel screening compared to 73 percent who did breast and 81 percent who did cervical.

Younger women, those from more [deprived areas](#) and those with other conditions were less likely to take part in any of the screening programmes. Women who took part in the breast or cervical screening programmes were also more likely to take part in the bowel screening.

Professor McCowan, Professor of Health Data Science at St Andrews, said: "This is the first study we know of that has looked at how individual women participate across all three available screening programmes. This research shows that there is still work to do to encourage women to take part in all three programmes but especially bowel screening.

"Exploring the characteristics of the groups of women least likely to take part in screening can help inform us when developing new ways to encourage participation."

Dr. Katie Robb, Reader in Behavioural Science and Health at the University of Glasgow, said: "The reasons why women do not take part in screening can be very complex. Understanding why fewer women take part in bowel screening than breast or cervical screening is necessary if we are to support women to overcome barriers to [bowel screening](#)."

**More information:** Colin McCowan et al. Comparing uptake across breast, cervical and bowel screening at an individual level: a retrospective cohort study, *British Journal of Cancer* (2019). [DOI: 10.1038/s41416-019-0564-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41416-019-0564-9)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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