

One in three female surgeons in UK have been sexually assaulted: survey

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Nearly a third of female surgeons in Britain have been sexually assaulted by a colleague in the past five years, according to a study published Tuesday and described as a "MeToo moment" for surgery.

The study, in the *British Journal of Surgery*, said its results "indicate that both [sexual harassment](#) and [sexual assault](#) may be commonplace in the UK surgical environment, and that rape happens".

Analyzing over 1,400 responses to an anonymous online [survey](#) among UK surgical workforce members, the study found that 29.9 percent of women reported being sexually assaulted by a colleague over the last five years compared to 6.9 percent of the men.

The survey also showed that 63.3 percent of women polled said they experienced being sexually harassed by colleagues as did 23.7 percent of the men.

"These findings show that women and men in the surgical workforce are living different realities. For women, being around colleagues is more often going to mean witnessing, and being a target of, sexual misconduct," the study said.

According to the survey, close to 90 percent of women and 81 percent of men said they had witnessed sexual harassment among colleagues over the five year period.

Alongside instances of rape at work, the study found that survey participants "reported rape by colleagues in other work-related contexts, including teaching spaces, conferences, and after-work events with colleagues".

The [survey data](#) also showed that almost 11 percent of women reported experiencing "forced [physical contact](#) linked to career opportunities".

"Sexual misconduct occurs frequently and appears to go unchecked in the surgical environment owing to a combination of a deeply hierarchical structure and a gender and power imbalance," the study said.

Tamzin Cuming, chair of the Women in Surgery Forum at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, said this "represents a MeToo moment for surgery".

"Now the real work has to start to bring about a profound change in the culture of health care," Cuming wrote in The Times newspaper.

The survey was commissioned by The Working Party on Sexual Misconduct in Surgery (WPSMS), a group of NHS surgeons, clinicians and researchers "who are working to raise awareness of [sexual misconduct](#) in surgery, to bring about cultural and organizational change".

More information: Christopher T Begeny et al, Sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape by colleagues in the surgical workforce, and how women and men are living different realities: observational study using NHS population-derived weights, *British Journal of Surgery* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/bjs/znad242](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjs/znad242)

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