

Sexism in medicine

The British Medical Association recently surveyed doctors about their experiences of sexism in the NHS. What do the results tell us?

Summary findings

In 2021 the British Medical Association (BMA) conducted an online survey on the experience of sexism among doctors working in the NHS. The BMA wanted to understand more about the individual impact that sexism might be having on doctors' day-to-day working lives and on their career opportunities. They received 2,458 eligible responses, 82% of which were from women. The results were quite striking:

- 91% of women respondents had experienced sexism at work within the past 2 years.
- 84% of all respondents said there was an issue of sexism in the medical profession.
- 28% of men said that they have/had more opportunities during training because of their gender compared to just 1% of women.
- 74% of all respondents thought that sexism acted as a barrier to career progression.
- 42% of all respondents who had witnessed or experienced an issue relating to sexism in the previous 2 years had chosen not to raise it with anyone.
- 61% of women felt discouraged to work in a particular specialty because of their gender.
- 70% of women felt that their clinical ability had been doubted or undervalued because of their gender, in comparison to just 12% of men.
- 31% of women had experienced unwanted physical conduct at work, as did 23% of men.
- 56% of women had received unwanted verbal conduct relating to gender, as did 28% of men.

Gendered perceptions of prevalence

Men doctors had very different views on the prevalence of sexism in the medical profession compared to women. Around four-out-of-ten men doctors (39.5%) thought that there was 'not too much' or no sexism at all in the NHS, compared to fewer than one-in-ten women doctors (8.9%) who thought the same (see Figure 1). A key finding was that for many doctors — but especially women — the perceptions that colleagues and wider society have about gender has an impact on the way they are treated and viewed at work. Women doctors were significantly more likely to say that their gender plays a negative role and leads to negative or inaccurate assumptions about their competency, seniority and value as a doctor.

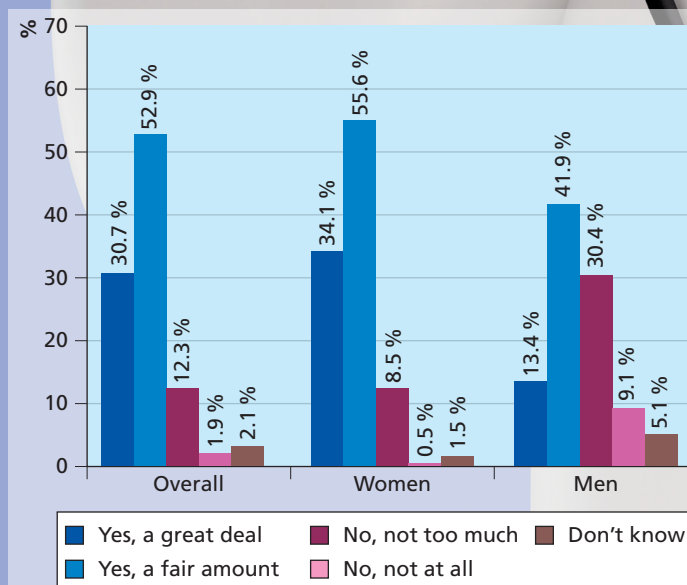


Figure 1 Do you think there is an issue of sexism in the medical profession? (n = 2295)

Causes

However, in terms of the perceived roots of the sexism identified in the NHS, both men and women respondents were divided between identifying structural factors or powerful individuals who may hold sexist views (see Figure 2). Linked to assumptions from patients and others around perceived seniority linked to gender, there was also a pattern of gender stereotypes impacting on perceived ability. When asked whether sexism acts as a barrier to career progression, some 80% of women respondents agreed with the proposition. Almost two-thirds of women doctors (64.6%) said they felt patients and others treated them 'less favourably' than they did men doctors.

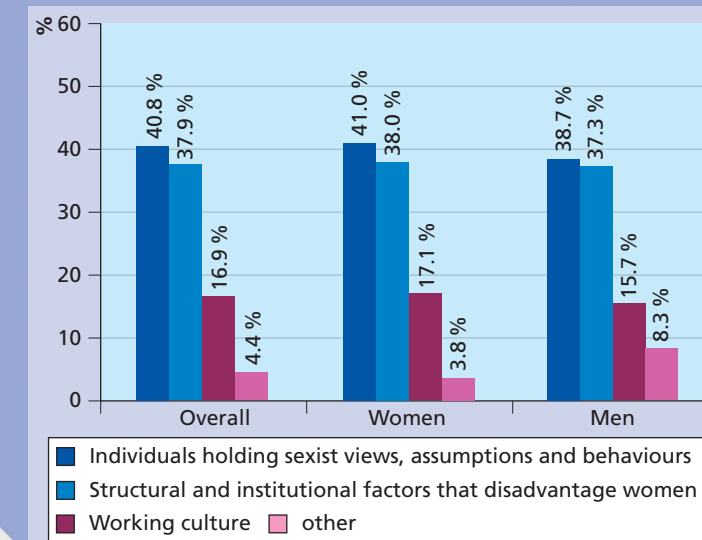


Figure 2 What do you think is the main driver of sexism in the medical profession? (n = 1,872)

Conclusions

The report concludes that results from the *Sexism in Medicine* survey demonstrate that significant steps needed to be taken to achieve gender equality in medicine. In spite of the significant increase in the number of women who have become doctors over the past decades, too many people still view medicine as a male profession. The failure to address structures and policies that favour a workforce of men, has allowed sexist attitudes and gender bias to remain prevalent, leading to unequal opportunities for women. Sexism is impacting women's long-term career progression as doctors and is causing problems in their day-to-day working lives.

RESOURCES

British Medical Association (2021) 'Sexism in medicine'. Available at: www.tinyurl.com/228yjxvm.

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