

# Say Her Name – Abuse Within the NHS

Patel M, Offer M, Overgage E, Kumar V, Faloon S, Clare S  
Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, UK

## Abstract:

Following the coronavirus pandemic, it has been widely recognised that violence against NHS staff has increased. This is in addition to existing reports of verbal, physical and sexual abuse found by the BMA and Unison (1, 2)

A survey conducted by the Women’s Clinician Network (WCN) at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust (SWBH) found a large proportion of staff had suffered abuse (verbal, physical or sexual) at work (82%), with female staff bearing the brunt of this (80%) (see figure 1).



Figure 1: 80% of staff experiencing violence identified as female.

Additionally, there is a significant difference in the rates of sexual violence faced by women in the workplace (63% of women surveyed experienced sexual violence as compared to 17% of men). Rates of incident reporting were low: 39% of victims reported physical abuse, 36% reported verbal abuse, and only 19% reported sexual violence.

A workshop was led by the WCN to address fears held by the workforce and to empower staff to begin reporting abuse they suffer or witness. Talks included the role of men as allies and a Q&A session led by West Midlands Police.

## Initial Survey Results:

Data was collected from attendees prior to the course. The same questionnaire was later shared with colleagues working at various trusts across the UK. A total of 50 responses were collected. None of those surveyed identified as other than male or female.

Whilst there was no significant difference in rates of verbal and physical abuse experienced by men and women, women were statistically more likely to experience sexual abuse in the workplace (p-value <0.01; figure 2). A greater proportion of women felt unsafe out of hours (figure 3).

Common barriers to reporting included feeling ‘nothing will be done’, abuse being ‘part of the job’ and ‘fear of consequences’; the latter was described only for reporting sexual abuse.

## Workshop Delivery:

The workshop was open to all members of staff working within SWBH, inclusive to all genders and disciplines.

Initial talks focussed on the disproportionate levels of violence against women in society, and how this is mirrored in the workplace. The role of men as allies was highlighted, with examples of practical measures which can be taken. A panel discussion was led by representatives of the West Midlands Police, including ways in which trust in authority can be developed and fostered.

## Post-course Feedback:

94% of attendees felt courses such as this were helpful for staff to deal with verbal abuse and physical violence at work.

94% of attendees stated they would report incidents where they may have been a witness to abuse as opposed to having been the victim.

89% of staff felt more empowered to report incidents to the police.

Feedback included the desire to have quarterly refresher training in reporting and self-defence.

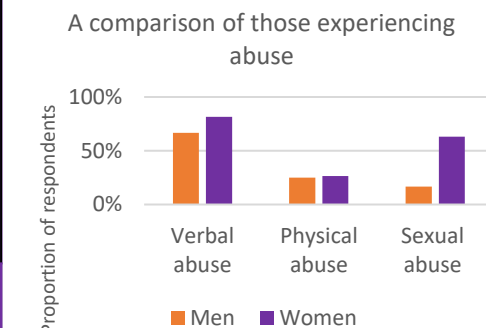


Figure 2: comparison of abuse between men and women.

## Do you feel safe out of hours?

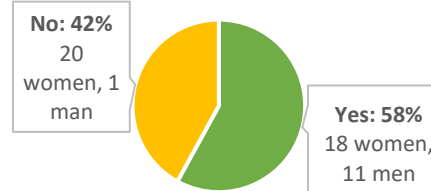


Figure 3: feeling safe out of hours.

## Recommendations:

We recommend workshops are delivered to staff across trusts to help staff feel safer at work and to empower staff to report incidents which occur. Emphasis should be placed on sexual harassment which is significantly under-reported; this may be as perpetrators are often colleagues. Other areas of improvement include working conditions out of hours. In doing so, we can create a safer environment to allow staff to provide the best care for patients.

## References:

- 1) BMA: ‘Preventing and reducing violence towards staff’ Nov 2021: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/creating-a-healthy-workplace/preventing-and-reducing-violence-towards-staff> [accessed 11/5/22]
- 2) Unison, It’s Never OK: A report on sexual harassment against healthcare staff, accessed via: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/06/sexualharassreport.pdf> [accessed 12/02/2023]