

Worsening Crisis in Women's Workplace Health: Updated Report by BOHS Calls for Urgent Action

5 months ago



A year after issuing a critical call for change, the [British Occupational Hygiene Society \(BOHS\)](#), the Chartered Society for Worker Health Protection, is issuing an [updated version of its analysis of the "UK's Hidden Crisis in Women's Workplace Health"](#). Despite a call to action, received and supported by some, the report finds work-related illness among women is facing a worsening crisis that continues to be inadequately addressed.

Since BOHS's initial report, the proportion of women experiencing work-induced illness has grown significantly. The latest analysis raises critical questions:

- Have health outcomes for women improved over the past year? The BOHS report indicates that, despite more awareness, the health crisis among women in the workplace has worsened. Long-term sickness rates for women have reached nearly 35%, overtaking men for the first time. An estimated 1.5 million women are currently off work due to ill-health.
- Which groups are most affected? Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey shows that workplace-related illness impacts an estimated 936,000 women compared to 806,000 men, with women experiencing consistently worse outcomes in most exposure categories, including MSDs and mental health.
- Are employers sufficiently aware of female health issues? According to Fawcett Society research, a significant proportion of women feel uncomfortable raising health concerns at work. Additionally, 40% report that health issues related to gender have negatively impacted their career prospects, while over 60% believe work has worsened their health.

- Emerging cancer risks linked to work: Breast cancer, often associated with night shifts, remains the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) highest predicted cancer risk. Recent studies reveal that night shift work is increasingly common among women, with high correlations to breast cancer, premature menopause, and miscarriage.

The report also highlights ongoing challenges in addressing reproductive health risks, workplace sexual violence, and underreporting of workplace injuries and illnesses. Despite calls for improved data collection, issues remain, such as the lack of RIDDOR requirements to address mental and physical harm from sexual violence.

BOHS CEO, Professor Kevin Bampton, said, "The lack of progress on protecting women's health in the workplace is truly inexcusable. The absence of research, scientific knowledge, data analysis, policy focus and proactivity is forcing women out of work and into ill-health. In tandem with the absence of a strategy on reproductive health and the workplace, this is a disaster for the UK."

Key Findings from the Updated Report:

- Underreporting of work-related illness among women remains a significant issue.
- Rising long-term sickness among women, with female sick leave rates now higher than those of men.
- Workplace exposures continue to disproportionately affect women, notably in the 35-45 age group, with increased risks across a range of health conditions.
- Sexual violence and harassment reporting mechanisms remain inadequate, calling for RIDDOR policy updates to account for the mental and physical impacts of workplace abuse.

You can read the full report here:

[The UK's Hidden Crisis in Women's Workplace Health Worsens](#)

BOHS is calling on policymakers, the HSE, and employers across all industries to prioritize women's workplace health as part of national equality policy. The Society is urging the implementation of improved data collection, monitoring, and regulatory measures to ensure that women's health in the workplace is protected.