

Gender Health Gap

2023 survey results

Survey executive summary

The 'Gender Health Gap' describes the inequity in healthcare provision due to a person's gender. Depending on where you live in the world, this gap could be less favoured to men, or women. For example, Russia has the largest men's health gap, where men experience poorer health outcomes compared to women. The UK, however, has the largest women's health gap across all G20 countries.

This, on top of a great amount of other national and international research, proves the gap exists for women in the UK. So, why is Benenden Health dedicating further research into this phenomenon?

Our research not only found that fewer than 1% of women surveyed believe the Gender Health Gap is worse than other countries in the G20, but also that 44% of women want to see more awareness of this gap raised, and women's health issues in general.

This ultimately shows a widespread lack of understanding of the UK's Gender Health Gap, as well as a need to raise more awareness.

Our research spans across 10,000 women in the UK, as well as 5,000 female employees and 1,000 male and female business owners, to paint a full picture of women's experiences, understand their barriers and identify their needs – both personally and in the workplace – so Benenden Health can help close this gap.

Intersectionality can be a big part of women's experiences – where their gender meets another important part of their lives, such as race or sexuality. This can add to discrimination and inequity amongst women. Our research therefore included demographic information to enable us to look into this. However, the findings didn't show a notable difference that we could comment on with certainty.

Please also note that due to the physiological nature of this research, when we refer to 'women/females', this is defined as anyone that experiences women's health issues such as periods, pregnancy and the menopause.

From our national survey of 10,000 women, we found:

A gender bias in health has significant impact on women receiving a diagnosis. Our research shows this can affect their physical and mental health, as well as their trust in healthcare professionals.

- Of those who have experienced a poorer health outcome, **57%** said they had a negative experience with a healthcare professional, **36%** said they have experienced a late diagnosis, **33%** said they had received an incorrect diagnosis and **24%** said they were put on the wrong medication
- Almost half of women have struggled to receive a diagnosis in their lives (**45%**), with as many as a third (**31%**) of these experiencing delays of longer than a year before getting their diagnosis, and a quarter (**26%**) are currently awaiting one
- Less than half of women believe that healthcare provision is set up to equally favour men and women, with a quarter (**27%**) saying that they think it favours men more than women

35%

of women say that they have experienced a poorer health outcome because of their gender

A lack of understanding of the Gender Health Gap is a key finding in our research, which could lead to less confidence in pushing for better diagnosis and treatment.

- **A third of women** believe that women spend more of their lives in poor health than men, whilst **13%** believe that men spend more of their lives in poor health
- A quarter of women (**28%**) believe that the Gender Health Gap exists in the UK, where women have poorer health outcomes
- One in ten (**11%**) think it does exist but that it is men who typically have worse health outcomes
- **Fewer than 1%** of women believe that the UK's Gender Health Gap is worse than other countries with a similar economy
- On the whole, women do not believe that many health issues have different symptoms for men and women, with **fewer than 35%** of women believing it to be true for ADHD, chronic pain, autism, heart conditions, dementia and strokes
- Women say they are reticent to seek medical support, with **35%** avoiding going to the doctors if they can, **38%** being nervous about doing so and **15%** embarrassed to see a medical professional
- The main things that women want to see from the government to support women's health were found to be more awareness around women's health issues (**44%**), more training on how to support women's health (**42%**), more funding for research (**39%**) and more female health professionals (**27%**)

60%

of women feel that they have had a health issue not taken seriously by a medical professional

On a day-to-day basis, women are living with the impact of poorer health outcomes.

47%

of women have seen a negative impact on their sex life due to women's health issues

47%

say health concerns have also negatively impacted their personal life

42%

have seen their professional life negatively impacted

38%

said hobbies have been negatively impacted

40%

say relationships have been negatively affected

53%

say women's health issues have negatively affected the way they feel about themselves

Benenden Health surveyed 5,000 female employees to understand how the Gender Health Gap influences their workplace. The research found discriminatory behaviour, barriers in communication and lack of support with their health issues to be most prominent.

Discriminatory behaviour

- A significant amount of women have had discriminatory experiences in the workplace, with more than a third (**37%**) hearing comments about women being more emotional than men, a further third (**33%**) experiencing jokes about women being on their period, **29%** being called bossy, **26%** being ignored by male colleagues and **18%** being treated differently because they are experiencing health issues
- **42%** of women have heard derogatory comments about a female employee's health in the workplace, often around them taking time off work, being difficult to work with and not being able to do their role
- As many as **40%** of women believe that their health has negatively impacted their professional career and development, with female employees saying they have missed important meetings, experienced negative comments and missing out on promotions and pay rises

Barriers in communication

- As many as **42%** of women would feel uncomfortable talking to their manager about their health issues
- Almost a third of women (**32%**) would be more comfortable discussing their health at work, with only **4%** being more comfortable talking to a male manager

Health and wellbeing support

- More than a third of female employees have experienced anxiety in the last year (**39%**) and **27%** have experienced depression
- On average, female employees say they took nine days off work due to health issues in the last year
- Almost three-quarters of female employees (**70%**) believe that having to manage periods at work makes their lives more difficult in the workplace, whilst **64%** report the same for the menopause, **62%** for when pregnant and **48%** believe that having to hide a pregnancy at work makes their lives more difficult

The most important things that an employer can do to support women's health in the workplace were revealed to be:

42%

**Pregnancy
loss leave**

31%

**Pregnancy
loss policies**

30%

Flexible leave when experiencing pregnancy

31%

**Statutory
maternity leave**

31%

**Offer free
sanitary products**

To understand the employers' and managers' perspective, Benenden Health surveyed 1,000 employers in the UK. We found a lack of confidence and understanding of women's health issues, and the consequences this has on a female employee.

- The attitudes from male and female business owners towards women's health in the workplace were revealed to be actually very similar
 - **35%** of male business owners revealed that they don't understand women's health issues and that it impacts their ability to support women in the workplace, compared to 37% of female business owners
 - **53%** of female business owners believe that women are more difficult to manage as a result of their health issues, compared to 47% of male business leaders
- **60%** of both female and male business owners agree that they would be able to get more out of their female employees if women had better health outcomes
- Around two-thirds of both female and male business owners explained that they would value more support in understanding women's health issues (**64% and 71%** respectively)
- Both male and female business owners agree that women take more time off from work than men across unexplained absences, annual leave and sick leave

Despite the calls from female employees, businesses on the whole are still not offering the support that women are asking for in the workplace:

- Only **18%** offer free sanitary products
- Only **15%** offer statutory maternity leave
- Only **14%** offer flexible working where women are not penalised for working flexibly
- Only **12%** have a wellbeing strategy in place
- Only **12%** have pregnancy loss policies/leave
- Only **12%** of businesses have a culture where women's health issues can be talked about

To learn more about our findings
and the Gender Health Gap,
please contact us:



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