

# **THOUSANDS OF RAPES AND SEXUAL ASSAULTS IN UK HOSPITALS - ONLY 4.1 PER CENT OF SUSPECTS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN CHARGED**

## **Women and children are being failed**

More than 6500 rapes and sexual assaults - some against children under 13 - have been committed in hospitals in England and Wales over nearly four years

Only 265 people (4.1 per cent) are known to have been charged for these offences.

The horrifying statistics - covering the lockdown period when hospitals were said to be more secure - reveal that at least 2088 rapes and 4451 sexual assaults (total: 6539) in hospitals were recorded by police forces in the UK since January 2019. One in 7 of the crimes (fig:1021) - or 266 a year - occurred on hospital wards.

The figures have been uncovered by researchers at Women's Rights Network who sent Freedom of Information (Fol) requests to 43 police forces in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Of the 35 forces to respond, shocking crimes were uncovered including:

- The rape of a female child under 13 and also the rape of a female over 16 by multiple offenders in West Midlands hospitals
- Three rapes of a female under 16 in Cambridgeshire
- Six rapes of girls under 13 in Lancashire

Although the Fol responses do not record the sex of the victims, national data shows that fewer than five per cent of rape victims are men so it is reasonable to assume that most victims were female.

But the WRN investigation also uncovered:

- Thirteen rapes of males over the age of 16 — with one incident involving multiple offenders.
- The sexual assault of a male child under the age of 13 in a Cambridgeshire hospital

Despite the fact that hospitals are closely monitored by CCTV and wards often have secure entry systems, only 4.1 per cent are known to have resulted in a charge or summons. Five forces – City of London, Durham, Devon and Cornwall, Northamptonshire and North Yorkshire – did not issue a single summons or charge a single suspect for any of the 334 sexual assaults in their areas.

The damning figures are probably 'the tip of an iceberg of indifference' around the safety of NHS patients and staff as some forces gave inadequate information.

Police Scotland did not provide any figures due to alleged cost constraints and of those in England and Wales who did respond:

- Seven forces provided incomplete responses
- Five did not give information on the number of assaults that occurred on hospital wards
- Three did not provide information about the number of people charged or summonsed.

These statistics are jaw-dropping. We began this investigation because a number of members raised concerns about the safety of women and children on NHS wards, but we are horrified at what we have uncovered.

The volume of sexual assaults and rapes is even more horrific when you consider that this data covers the pandemic, when much of the country was in lockdown and hospitals were supposedly even more vigilant.

Hospitals are places where everyone - patients, staff and visitors - should feel completely safe. But rapes and violent assaults are taking place every week in hospitals. To add to the horror, those men committing the crimes are getting away with it.

A charge rate of 4.1 percent is appalling - the hospitals and police are failing women and children yet again.

*Heather Binning, founder of WRN*

**Jo Phoenix, Professor of Criminology and Deputy Head of the Law School at Reading University and a member of the Women's Rights Network Academic Unit is author of the WRN's report: '*When We Are At Our Most Vulnerable*'.**

The figures that WRN has uncovered are shocking and prove that NHS Trusts are failing in their duty to protect both patients and staff. Further, the fact that 95.9 per cent of all reports were either no-further-actioned or not recorded is also truly appalling. Although there are no reasons given within the research for this alarmingly low figure, what is clear is that there appears to be ingrained inertia in dealing with this safeguarding and policing failure.

*Jo Phoenix, report author*

**The Women's Rights Network is calling on NHS authorities, the Care Quality Commission and police constabularies to formally acknowledge this hidden domain of sexual violence. We urge:**

- The Home Office to require police constabularies to record the full data about sexual violence in hospitals, including location, sex of victim and alleged perpetrator.
- NHS authorities to signpost procedures which encourage staff to report safeguarding concerns and to take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously.
- Apply single sex exemptions for hospital wards to ensure that women and girls in particular are adequately protected.

- Protect staff from sexual assault while at work and to record appropriate data so that there is a better understanding of these crimes.
- Review existing safety measures and assess the need to install additional CCTV and/or door-entry systems