



## WRN Scotland report

# How safe are our Scottish hospitals?

THE CONCERNING EXTENT OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS AND RAPES IN SCOTTISH HOSPITALS 2019/24

Report authors: Carolyn Brown, Mary Howden

March 2025



# Foreword

by Heather Binning, Founder of Women's Rights Network



I welcome wholeheartedly this report from Women's Rights Network Scotland (WRN Scotland).

It sits alongside our earlier report published in 2023, *When we are at our most vulnerable* written by Professor Jo Phoenix.

This new report *How safe are our Scottish hospitals?* again raises the profile for our concerns over the safety and safeguarding of women and girls.

Like our 2023 report, this new report from WRN Scotland makes for sobering reading.

With a total of 198 FOIs completed to Police Scotland, we surveyed 198 hospital settings over a five-year period.

Data was made available from Police Scotland for only 57 of the 198 hospitals surveyed.

These 57 hospitals alone reported incidences of 276 sexual assaults and 12 rapes. Of these, 163 sexual assaults and rapes occurred on hospital wards.

**“ These 57 hospitals alone reported incidences of 276 sexual assaults and 12 rapes. Of these, 163 sexual assaults and rapes occurred on hospital wards.**

---

Given there is a lack of clarity about what data is kept, where it is kept, and how it is used, it is clear that such figures are likely to be significantly under-reported.

The data gathered by WRN Scotland also highlights a major concern about safeguarding in our hospitals including children's, maternity, palliative care and psychiatric hospitals. Of psychiatric hospitals, 72% reported between one and 12 sexual assaults each.

The findings of this new report are just not acceptable. Our network has been highlighting the significant safeguarding issues of vulnerable women for years. It certainly seems the case that many of those in power have failed us.

We must not and cannot tolerate this misogynistic culture within our society. The wellbeing and safeguarding of everyone in all our communities depends upon this.

# Executive summary

Based on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to Police Scotland, cumulative data for 2019/24 was gathered about the number of sexual assaults, including rape, that occurred in Scotland's NHS and private hospitals.

The data gathered included the entire COVID period when scrutiny of access to, and movement around, hospitals was at its most intense.

This report surveyed 198 hospitals in Scotland, which included 11 private hospitals, using data secured through FOI requests to Police Scotland.

We found data on sexual assaults was not routinely kept by all hospitals.

Police Scotland was unable to provide data on the number of sexual assaults and rapes committed in 133 of 198 hospitals, and refused to provide data for eight hospitals on privacy grounds.

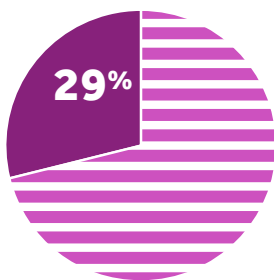
**“ Police Scotland was unable to provide data on the number of sexual assaults and rapes committed in 133 of 198 hospitals and refused to provide data for eight hospitals on privacy grounds.**

Data was made available from Police Scotland for only 57 of the 198 hospitals surveyed. These 57 hospitals alone reported incidences of 276 sexual assaults and 12 rapes. Of these, 163 sexual assaults and rapes took place on hospital wards.

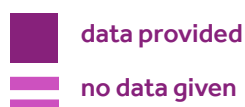
Given this failure to provide data, and given that sexual assault is commonly under-reported, it will undoubtedly be the case that the number of actual sexual assaults and rapes in Scotland's hospitals will be significantly higher than the figures reported here.

Twelve incidents of rape were reported across eight hospitals, which is likely to be an under-estimate of actual rape incidences in hospital settings.

**Data not given for 71% of Scottish hospitals**



Police Scotland was only able to give us sexual assault and rape data for 57 of 198 Scottish hospitals. We were told data was not held by 67% of hospitals, with 4% refusing to share it, citing 'privacy'.



Of the 288 sexual assaults and rapes recorded, 163 occurred on a hospital ward (57%). Charges of sexual assault and/or rape were made against 156 individuals.

- Stobhill Hospital (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde) had the highest number of sexual assaults with 20 recorded.
- The second highest recorded sexual assaults occurred in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, in (NHS Lothian) with 18 recorded.
- The three largest NHS boards – Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Lothian and Fife – recorded the majority of sexual assaults and rapes.

- Psychiatric hospitals have been identified as being a particular concern given the frequency of sexual assaults occurring in the majority of psychiatric contexts.

“ Psychiatric hospitals have been identified as being a particular concern given the frequency of sexual assaults occurring in the majority of psychiatric contexts.

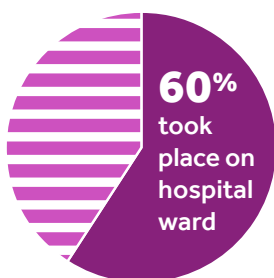
- A maternity hospital in NHS Grampian and a second in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde between them recorded three sexual assaults and two rapes, with two of these occurring on a ward.

- The Royal Hospital for Children (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde) recorded one sexual assault.
- The Roxburghe House (NHS Grampian) hospital for palliative care recorded one sexual assault.

This report identifies a number of long overdue priorities to improve the safeguarding of women in hospitals.

These include the urgent need to establish a centralised, coordinated and transparent recording system across NHS boards to inform policy development and guidance.

### Sexual assaults and/or rapes in a hospital ward



From the data supplied by Police Scotland, close to six in 10 of all sexual assaults and/or rapes in a Scottish hospital setting had happened on a ward.

### Highest numbers given for sexual assaults by hospital



Stobhill Hospital in Glasgow and Edinburgh’s Royal Infirmary had the highest recorded number of sexual assaults, with 20 at Stobhill and 18 at the Royal Infirmary.

# Background

Those who have an interest in safeguarding women have for nearly 10 years been raising concerns about the risks of women and children being sexually assaulted in hospitals.

Despite previous recommendations from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) including *Sexual Safety on Mental Health Wards, (2018)*<sup>1</sup> and other reports such as *Promoting Sexual Safety Through Empowerment, (2020)*<sup>2</sup> and *Learning from Incidences (2022, Issue 11)*<sup>3</sup> there is no central system to record the number of rapes and sexual assaults in UK hospitals.

The Scottish Government's report, *Women's Health Plan 2021-2024: final report*<sup>4</sup> stated as its first priority that it aimed to, '**reduce inequalities in outcomes for women's general health**'.

This report went on to say: '**Women and girls... are socialised and stereotyped to not make a fuss.**'

The implication of this is that more care needs to be taken regarding women's rights, women's earnings, and women's safeguarding.

The irony and double standards of this statement cannot be overlooked in the Scottish context.

Scottish Government politicians have sought, and it would appear, continue to seek, to erode women's rights and safeguarding by promoting legislation that will allow males to self-identify as women.

This puts the Scottish Government's health plan for women in an entirely contradictory position.

---

1 <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-report/sexual-safety-mental-health-wards>

---

2 [https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20200226\\_asc\\_sexual\\_safety\\_sexuality\\_summary.pdf](https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20200226_asc_sexual_safety_sexuality_summary.pdf)

---

3 Issue 11: Promoting sexual safety - Care Quality Commission

---

4 Women's health plan - gov.scot

Murray, Blackburn and Mackenzie highlighted the erosion of women's rights in their 2022 report on single-sex hospital accommodation in Scotland.<sup>5</sup>

They pointed out that Scottish political leaders gave commitments to achieving single-sex hospital accommodation as far back as 1999 when Labour minister Sam Galbraith MSP and Susan Deacon MSP both pledged to address this issue in hospitals.

More recently in July 2022, when Humza Yousaf MSP was Health Minister, he restated the Scottish Government's commitment to single-sex wards.

Murray, Blackburn and Mackenzie made clear that the problem of mixed-sex wards remains, '**principally due to the mainstreaming of gender self-identification policies by Scottish public bodies, and the prioritisation of gender identity over sex**'.

The Women's Rights Network (WRN) report which examined sexual assaults in hospitals, *When we are at our most vulnerable*, Phoenix, J. (2023)<sup>6</sup> found there had been 6,539 reported rapes and sexual assaults in UK hospitals between January 2019 and October 2022 (2,088 rapes and 4,451 sexual assaults).

Of those rapes and sexual assaults 1,021 were on hospital wards and there were, on average, 33 rapes and sexual assaults in hospitals every week.

This was an under-estimate given a number of police forces did not make returns and that rape and sexual assault are crimes consistently under-reported, as extensive research studies have found.

The report drew attention to Police Scotland as one of the police forces that did not respond to FOI requests submitted by WRN.

Police Scotland had stated that its reason for not responding was: '**There are no markers etc on any of our crime recording systems to indicate whether an offence occurred in a hospital.**'

Clearly this is highly problematic, particularly where the development of safeguarding policies and guidance for hospitals is concerned.

---

5 Murray, Blackburn & Mackenzie, (2022), *The erosion of single-sex hospital accommodation in Scotland*, MurrayBlackburnMackenzie.org2 [https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20200226\\_asc\\_sexual\\_safety\\_sexuality\\_summary.pdf](https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20200226_asc_sexual_safety_sexuality_summary.pdf)

---

6 Phoenix, J. (2023), *When we are at our most vulnerable*, Women's Rights Network WRN Hospital Report | Women's Rights Network | UK4 Women's health plan - gov.scot

# Methodology

To see if we could help resolve the issue of Police Scotland being unable to secure relevant data, a WRN Scotland member wrote to her MP, John McNally, who contacted Police Scotland on her behalf.

Police Scotland advised him that they would be able to provide the information if we could give information on each hospital and its location in the FOI request. To that end WRN Scotland undertook a pilot study in 2023.

Using FOI legislation, the WRN Scotland research team sampled 34 Scottish hospitals via Police Scotland in the pilot study and for consistency the same questions were used:

1. How many reports have been made to Police Scotland of sexual assaults which are alleged to have taken place at X hospital since 1 Jan 2019?
2. How many reports have been made to Police Scotland of rape which are alleged to have taken place at X hospital since 1 Jan 2019?
3. How many of the above points 1 & 2 were reported to have taken place on a hospital ward?
4. How many people have been charged with sexual assault/rape re: 1 and 2 above?

This pilot study proved effective in gathering information from Police Scotland (see *Findings*). *The Sun* newspaper also reported on the pilot study.<sup>7</sup>

In 2024 a full survey was undertaken using the same question set with 198 individual FOIs sent to Police Scotland for hospitals in Scotland.

The services these covered included clinics, day centres, resource centres and all private hospitals.

---

<sup>7</sup> More than 100 sex attacks at Scotland's hospitals reported in the last four years | *The Scottish Sun*



# Findings

## 1. Pilot survey of 34 Scottish NHS hospitals 2019/23 (via Police Scotland)

The responses from Police Scotland for the pilot survey provided the following information:

- There was **no recorded data for 12 hospitals** (35.3% of total hospitals surveyed)
- There were reported **sexual assault incidents in 22 hospitals** (64.7% of total hospitals surveyed)
- There were **138 sexual assaults across 22 hospitals** with a range of 1-14 sexual assaults and an average of 6.2 sexual assaults per hospital
- **across 5 hospitals 7 incidents of rape** were recorded
- Of the 138 sexual assaults and rapes:
  - » **94 (70.1%)** were recorded as occurring on hospital wards
  - » **76 individuals** were charged with sexual assault and/or rape.

**Table 1: Total sexual assaults and rapes by hospital 2019/23**

SEXUAL ASSAULT & RAPES BY HOSPITAL 2019/23	
Total number of hospitals	34
Refusal on privacy grounds	0
Data not kept number of hospitals	12 (35.3%)
Data recorded number of hospitals	22 (64.7%)
Recorded sexual assaults	131
Recorded rapes	7
Total recorded sexual assaults/rapes	138
Recorded sexual assaults/rapes on ward	94
Individuals charged	76

## 2. Main survey of 198 Scottish NHS hospitals 2019/24 (via Police Scotland)

The responses to our latest survey gave this information:

- Provision of information was refused for 8 (4%) hospitals, stating privacy reasons.
- FOI requests found for 133 hospitals (67%) the requested information could not be given as the data was not held.
- There were reported sexual assault and rape incidents in 57 (28%) hospitals with a range of 1-20 sexual assaults recorded. 276 sexual assaults were recorded in total across the 57 hospitals.
- Worryingly, sexual assaults and rapes were recorded in two maternity hospitals. One in NHS Grampian recorded 1 rape. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde recorded 3 sexual assaults and 1 rape with 2 occurring on a ward – 2 individuals were charged.
- The Royal Hospital for Children (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde) recorded 1 sexual assault on a ward.
- The Roxburghe House (NHS Grampian) hospital for palliative care recorded 1 sexual assault on a ward.
- Given data was not routinely kept by 67% of hospitals, the number of actual sexual assaults will undoubtedly be significantly higher.
- 12 incidents of rape were reported across 8 hospitals. Again, it is more than likely this is a gross under-estimate of the actual incidence of rape in hospital settings.
- Of the 288 sexual assaults and rapes, 163 occurred on a hospital ward (57%).
- 156 individuals were charged with sexual assault and/or rape.

**Table 2: Total sexual assaults and rapes by hospital 2019/24**

SEXUAL ASSAULT & RAPES BY HOSPITAL 2019/24	
Total number of hospitals	198
Refusal on privacy grounds	8 (4%)
Data not kept number of hospitals	133 (67%)
Data recorded number of hospitals	57 (29%)
Recorded sexual assaults	276
Recorded rapes	12
Total recorded sexual assaults/rapes	288
Recorded sexual assaults/rapes on ward	163
Individuals charged	156

### 3. NHS boards

The NHS boards with the largest populations recorded the highest number of sexual assaults.

- NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde with 21 hospitals recorded the highest number of sexual assaults and rapes: 76 assaults and 6 rapes, totalling 82. Of these assaults 56 were on hospital wards. Police charged 38 individuals.
- NHS Lothian with 16 hospitals had the second highest recorded number of sexual assaults. There were 41 sexual assaults recorded and no rapes, with 24 of the sexual assaults on hospital wards. The police charged 24 individuals.
- NHS Fife with 12 hospitals had the third highest number of sexual assaults. There were 34 sexual assaults recorded and no rapes. Of the sexual assaults 18 were recorded on wards and 20 individuals were charged by the police.

**Table 3: total sexual assaults and rapes by health board 2019/24**

SEXUAL ASSAULTS & RAPES BY HEALTH BOARD 2019/24				
Health board	Number of sexual assaults	Number of rapes	Number on ward	Number charged
Ayrshire & Arran	4	1	2	4
Borders	3	0	0	3
Dumfries & Galloway	5	0	3	2
Fife	34	0	18	20
Forth Valley	11	0	6	7
Grampian	22	1	15	10
Greater Glasgow & Clyde	76	6	56	38
Highland	20	1	18	5
Lanarkshire	26	0	10	20
Lothian	41	0	24	24
Orkney	1	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0
Tayside	17	3	10	8
Western Isles	1	0	1	0

## 4. Psychiatric hospitals

Our data shows the majority of psychiatric hospitals in Scotland had recorded a number of sexual assaults including rape.

At least 13 (72%) of the 18 psychiatric hospitals had recorded sexual assaults, with a range of between 1-12 sexual assaults.

No data was given for some psychiatric hospitals in the Ayrshire & Arran, Grampian, Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Lanarkshire and Tayside health board areas. It was either withheld or access refused.

With repeated reports of data not held or information denied due to 'privacy issues' it is likely actual figures were significantly higher. Given the vulnerabilities of psychiatric patients, this is particularly concerning.

The majority of victims of sexual assault are women and sexual assaults recorded from psychiatric hospitals will have been predominantly on vulnerable women suffering mental health conditions.

These are the very places meant to be improving the mental health of vulnerable individuals but by failing their safeguarding duties they will have been exacerbating mental health difficulties.

This specific concern needs urgent examination by NHS boards.

**Table 4: total sexual assaults and rapes in psychiatric hospital 2019/24**

SEXUAL ASSAULTS & RAPES IN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL BY HEALTH BOARD 2019/24				
Health board	Sexual assaults	Rapes	Number on ward	Number charged
Borders	1	0	1	1
Dumfries & Galloway	2	0	2	1
Fife	12	0	3	12
Grampian	12	0	9	6
Highland	12	1	12	5
Greater Glasgow & Clyde	38	1	33	19
Lothian	10	0	7	5
Tayside	7	2	3	2
Western Isles	1	0	1	0

## 5. Private hospitals

Private hospitals were not exempt from sexual assaults. 15 sexual assaults were recorded in the two hospitals that did supply data to Police Scotland.

As was the case with NHS hospitals, no information was held by Police Scotland for the other nine hospitals.

This makes it likely that the above figure is much lower than the actual number of sexual assault incidents that occurred.

**Table 5: Total sexual assaults and rapes by private hospital 2019/24**

SEXUAL ASSAULT & RAPES BY PRIVATE HOSPITAL 2019/24	
Total number of hospitals	11
Refusal on privacy grounds	0
Data not kept number of hospitals	9
Data recorded number of hospitals	2
Recorded sexual assaults	15
Recorded rapes	0
Total recorded sexual assaults/rapes	15
Recorded sexual assaults/rapes on ward	0
Individuals charged	15

## 6. NHS hospitals that did not hold or would not share data

It is worth noting that FOI information was not provided for 141 hospitals. FOI requests found that for 133 hospitals (67%) information could not be provided.

It was stated that this data was not held. Another 8 responses (4%) were refused due to privacy concerns.

This would suggest that where there were privacy concerns sexual assaults or rapes had been recorded. Otherwise the response would have been that the data was not held.

**Table 6: Total health board sexual assault/rapes data not held/refused 2019-2024**

HEALTH BOARD SEXUAL ASSAULT & RAPES DATA NOT HELD/REFUSED 2019-2024		
Health board	Not held	Refused
Ayrshire & Arran	12	2
Borders	11	1
Dumfries & Galloway	9	0
Fife	5	0
Forth Valley	5	1
Grampian	17	0
Greater Glasgow & Clyde	6	2
Highland	24	0
Lanarkshire	8	0
Lothian	7	1
Orkney	0	0
Shetland	1	0
Tayside	17	1
Western Isles	2	0

## 7. Riskiest hospital settings

Of the sexual assaults in hospitals recorded by Police Scotland, there was a range of 1-20 sexual assaults depending on the hospital.

Clearly the number of beds per hospital will have some impact but it is likely hospital size is not the only factor in determining the likelihood of getting sexually assaulted in a hospital.

Other organisational factors such as access to wards, hospital layout, policies and staff guidance may have had a bearing on some hospitals being riskier for sexual assaults.

Stobhill Hospital (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde) had the highest number of sexual assaults recorded, with 20. It is, however nowhere near to being the biggest Scottish hospital by bed numbers.

The second highest recorded figure was at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh hospital (NHS Lothian), with 18 sexual assaults.

Surprisingly a private hospital, the Cygnet Wallace, was third worst with 13 sexual assaults.

Our research was not extensive enough to identify possible causes or reasons for these three hospitals to have the highest recorded figures for sexual assaults.

Clearly the risk of sexual assault in any hospital is an important area for future study with a view to identifying preventive practices.

## 8. Nature of incidents

Our data was limited to the responses we got in answer to the four FOI questions asked. Some of the data recorded on individuals charged (see *NHS boards table 4*) shows relatively high numbers of individuals charged for what looked likely to be the same offence.

It may well be the case that certain incidents involved groups of individuals assaulting patients or staff. This is a worrying possibility and requires follow-up research as a matter of priority.

## 9. Safeguarding

Our report shows that whatever safeguarding policies and guidance NHS boards have in place, they are failing to be fully effective and they are especially failing to protect vulnerable women and girls. This needs further investigation.

# Data gathering

It became clear to us that gathering centralised and coherent data about sexual assaults and rapes is a major issue.

From the responses we got from Police Scotland to our FOIs, it was noted that for 67% of hospitals the requested data was 'not held' and an additional 4% of responses were refused on privacy grounds..

It would appear neither Police Scotland nor our NHS boards, routinely gather figures that capture data on sexual assault trends. As noted earlier, Police Scotland replied to the Phoenix report completed in 2023: **'There are no markers etc on any of our crime recording systems to indicate whether an offence occurred in a hospital.'**

We do not know what data is kept about sexual assaults in hospitals. We only know some data has made it into the Police Scotland recording systems.

We do not know the parameters relating to this data, including what data is gathered, where it is gathered, how data is collated and organised and how it is used to inform preventive practice and safeguarding for all hospital patients.

## **Our report has not been able to ascertain the following:**

- Does Police Scotland gather data about sexual assaults in hospitals on a regular basis?
- Is the information stored in different ways in different parts of the system?
- How are the sexual assaults reported to Police Scotland?
- Are there established and well understood recording procedures for NHS boards?
- What does Police Scotland do with any data that is recorded?
- Do hospitals collect their own data? If so, what data do they collect?

Given no information was held for 67% of hospitals, these unanswered questions are cause for alarm. It is likely data keeping is limited and inconsistent.

The data that has been recorded is concerning enough but it is inevitable that these are under-reported figures and that the risks of sexual assault occurring in our hospitals are much worse than the current figures suggest, damning though they already are.

It is surely only right that our hospitals make sure that they are taking preventive approaches and gathering necessary data to inform their daily practice and that they make this information publicly available.



# NHS board responses

The *Sunday Post*'s article (12 Jan 2025)<sup>8</sup> covering sexual assaults in hospitals, asked the health boards to respond to the emerging data about sexual assaults in hospitals (see appendix 2).

Some concerns were noted by NHS boards but in every case, the responses were illuminating in their bland, defensive and patronising denials.

Despite having the second highest number of sexual assaults in Scotland, the depute chief executive for NHS Lothian responded: **'We actively encourage anyone to report incidents to us or directly to Police Scotland. We have robust measures in place to ensure immediate action is taken when incidents are reported and are dedicated to maintaining a safe environment for everyone.'**

Fife Health and Social Care Partnership stated: **'It remains incredibly rare for incidents of this type to occur in our hospitals... Where an incident is reported to us, there are robust procedures in place to ensure a thorough investigation and prompt escalation to Police Scotland.'**

NHS Tayside said: **'Staff [are] encouraged to report all episodes, no matter how minor, on our incident reporting system [so they get] appropriate, timely and practical support.'**

**'Advice as needed is taken from local police to manage incidents when they occur... There are areas in our hospitals where patients may display challenging behaviours due to their medical conditions. Staff working [there] are appropriately trained in NHS Tayside's aggression and violence management policy.'**

An NHS Grampian official said: **'Any incident where a patient, staff member or visitor comes to harm, in any way, is deeply concerning to us. With around a million patient contacts every year, incidents such as this are extremely rare [and] safety and security are a priority for us.'**

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said: **'Stobhill Hospital is a key site for our mental health patients. We are concerned by the incidents of sexual assault reported in the five-year period [and] appropriate action has been taken in each case.'**

**'We understand the concern this may cause for patients and families and [assure them] we are dedicated to maintaining a safe environment for everyone.'**

It had, it said, recently drawn up its first public protection strategy. **'All patients or staff who have [been assaulted] are encouraged to report the incident to the police and there are policies in place to support them.'** Immediate action would be taken **'if the police are called to an assault incident'**.

Have any of these health boards examined their own data? Do they know who the victims are and what they experienced? **When reality is denied or glossed over, all trust is lost.**

8 PressReader.com - Digital Newspaper & Magazine Subscriptions

# Conclusions

Sexual assault is a major issue in many hospitals and hospital settings, predominantly affecting women.

The 276 recorded sexual assaults and 12 recorded rapes in Scottish hospitals should weigh heavily on all those responsible for providing NHS and private hospital services.

Given that Police Scotland could only give details for just 29% of all hospitals, it is inevitable that the number of sexual assaults that have taken place in Scottish hospitals is significantly higher.

Given all established research on sexual assaults identifies women and girls as the victims, it can be readily assumed that most of the victims of sexual assault recorded in this report will have been women and girls.

This report could find no evidence of a central and/or coherent data keeping system or processes across and within NHS boards. Record keeping for sexual assaults has to improve.

**“ This report could find no evidence of a central and/or coherent data keeping system or processes across and within NHS boards. Record keeping for sexual assaults has to improve.**

Neither the age nor sex of the victims were recorded in the data collected. Both are essential to planning and improving practice and policy.

The numbers of sexual assaults and rapes collated in this report are undoubtedly lower than the real figures due to a mix of under-reporting by individuals and uncertainty about what data is recorded by hospitals.

Thirteen (72%) of Scotland's 18 psychiatric hospitals had recorded sexual assaults.

It is extremely concerning that sexual assaults were reported in one children's hospital, two maternity hospitals and a palliative care hospital.

There is some indication that in certain instances, due to the number of individuals charged, there may have been incidents of sexual assaults by groups of individuals. This should be explored further as a priority.

Given these findings, we can only conclude that NHS boards have missed opportunities to put preventive safeguarding measures in place.

The issue of sexual assaults in hospitals has been identified in previous reports. For example, the Care Quality Commission (2018)<sup>9</sup> highlighted concerns about sexual assaults in NHS settings, leading all English NHS trusts to adopt 'Sexual Safety' policies.

Given the findings of our report, it remains to be seen what action, if any, has been taken to date by Scottish NHS boards.

9 <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-report/sexual-safety-mental-health-wards>

# Recommendations

**1**

NHS management should act as a matter of urgency to make hospitals **places of safety** and to minimise all risks of sexual assault.

**2**

An essential first step is putting **systems and record keeping procedures** in place to ensure patient safety.

**3**

As a matter of urgency, transparent procedures should be implemented for patients and staff to **report incidents and/or raise concerns**. The public should be able to access this information.

**4**

Accurate data collection must include the **age and sex (not the gender) of both victims and alleged perpetrators**. This data is essential.

**5**

The extent of risk of sexual assault in any hospital is an important area for future study to identify **preventive practices, and better management policies and guidelines** for staff.

**6**

Further research into **psychiatric hospitals** must be conducted as a specific concern regarding sexual assault and the need for heightened safeguarding and effective risk management procedures.

**7**

Accommodating women on **single-sex wards** would contribute significantly to improved safeguarding from sexual assault in hospitals for women and girls.

**8**

Given current pressures on the NHS, where women cannot be accommodated on single sex wards then **heightened risk management and safeguarding procedures** must be put in place.

**9**

NHS boards should move to make all policies and procedures relating to the above recommendations **publicly available**.



The Women's Rights Network (WRN) is a rapidly growing grassroots network of women from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland whose primary focus is to defend the sex-based rights of women.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to

### Report authors

Carolyn Brown  
Mary Howden

### FOI researchers

Nina Hilton  
Mary Howden  
Joanna McCormick  
Morag Nicoll  
Lucy Powls

### Typesetting/graphics

Lisa Thompson