Over 60 Percent of Gynecologic Oncologists Say They Have Experienced Sexual Harassment

For immediate release  
June 3, 2019  
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ASCO Perspective  
“We know sexual harassment is a widespread societal issue, and it is increasingly recognized that sexual harassment affects many women in medicine – and as this study shows, also some men – both during training as well as in practice. As this study makes clear, we have a responsibility to raise awareness so that sexual harassment and other issues related to gender bias can be addressed at a broader level, with the ultimate goal of making the workplace safer and more equitable for everyone,” said ASCO Expert Merry-Jennifer Markham, MD, FACP.

CHICAGO – A recent survey of U.S.-based physician members of the Society of Gynecologic Oncology found that 64% of respondents experienced sexual harassment in training or practice; among women, the rate was 71% and among men it was 51%. Only 10% reported the incident(s) to officials. In addition, women were more likely than men to respond that gender affected career advancement (34% vs. 10%) and played a role in setting their salary (42% vs. 6%).

The study will be featured in a press briefing today and presented at the 2019 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting.

“The topic of sexual harassment has been widely discussed in the media as it applies to the movie, music, and sports industries, but conversation in the medical community has largely been limited to personal anecdotes discussed behind closed doors,” said lead study author Marina Stasenko, MD, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY. “Gender disparities have persisted in medicine despite a growing number of female physicians, and through our study we hope to increase awareness and acknowledgment of sexual harassment and gender inequalities within gynecologic oncology, hopefully leading to future interventions to address these disparities.”
The study was designed to evaluate perceived gender biases, the prevalence of sexual harassment in training and the workplace, and the impact of gender and harassment on career growth and advancement. It was modeled, in part, on an Association of American Medical Colleges survey on this topic that has been conducted since 2012.

The anonymous survey was sent in October 2018 to all 1,566 U.S.-based Society of Gynecologic Oncology members who were physicians. Of those queried, 402 (26%) replied; 255 replies were from women and 147 were from men.

**Key Findings**

Some form of sexual harassment during training or practice was experienced by 64% of all respondents: 71% of women and 51% of men. Only 10% reported the incident(s) to officials, 17% of women and 10% of men, although the difference is not statistically significant. The most common reasons for not reporting sexual harassment incident(s) to officials were that respondents thought the incident(s) did not seem important enough (40%) or that nothing would be done about it (37%), and fear of retaliation (34%).

The most frequent forms of sexual harassment experienced by those in training or practice, respectively, were:

- Being subjected to sexist remarks (58/51% of women and 28/24% of men).
- Being denied opportunities for training (26/33% of women and 17/19% of men).
- Unwanted sexual advances (30/23% of women and 27/28% of men).
- Asked to exchange sexual favors for academic positions (4% of women and 2% of men, equally in training and practice).

Additional survey findings included:

- 31% of women and 14% of men said they received lower evaluations or academic positions as a result of harassment.
- 34% of women stated that gender had affected their career advancement, compared with 10% of men.
- 42% of women stated that gender played a role in setting their salary, compared with 6% of men.
- 57% of women perceived a gender pay gap, compared with 9% of men.

**Next Steps**

Dr. Stasenko noted that she hopes this study leads to a larger conversation about sexual harassment in the medical field and serves as a launch pad for further actions.

This study was funded by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY.

**Study at a Glance**
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<th>Study Focus</th>
<th>Sexual harassment in the field of gynecologic oncology</th>
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<td>Study Type</td>
<td>Survey of physicians</td>
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<td>Survey Respondents</td>
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<td>Aspect Surveyed</td>
<td>Rate of sexual harassment</td>
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<td>Primary Finding</td>
<td>64% of respondents experienced sexual harassment</td>
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<td>Secondary Finding(s)</td>
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