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# Nine in 10 women say IT sector is biased

**Ninety per cent of female workers say industry is unfair and one in three has been victim of sexism**

JANIE DAVIES

Women working in technology face a wide range of problems that conspire to obstruct their career development or drive them out of the industry altogether, according to three separate studies.

Ninety per cent of female technology professionals feel that the industry discriminates against them and one in three has been the victim of sexism, according to a survey of 284 women carried out by IT recruitment group InterQuest.

Separate research by the information systems unit at University of Salford said key issues included intolerant attitudes towards working mothers, pay discrimination and a reluctance to address specific incidents of sexism or hostility.

"We asked women to sketch their career history and many had experienced unfair treatment directly related to their gender, or felt their authority was not accepted," said Dr Marie Griffiths, academic fellow at the University of Salford Business School.

"A woman who returned from maternity leave found her desk had been removed and her temporary external replacement was earning £10,000 more than her," she said.

"And when a new female employee arrived at a team meeting, a male colleague said: 'You

could have got one with big tits'. This was not dealt with."

Many respondents to the Salford survey found childcare commitments to be a huge issue, and that they were expected to make unreasonable sacrifices. Where flexible working opportunities were offered, many felt that making use of them would be tantamount to career death, regardless of the employee's gender.

"Women are being viewed as lacking commitment if they have to leave work at 5pm to relieve childminders," said Griffiths. "But a man could hurt his foot playing football and be off for three months."

However, Carrie Hartnell, programme manager of transformational business at industry trade body Intellect, said: "We cannot bring it all down to women leaving at 30 to have children. We have companies having trouble training people in their 20s and retaining people in their 40s.

"But women still feel excluded in the way people are put forward for promotion. Many do not promote themselves in the same way as men and there is a feeling that women need to be like men to do well," she said.

Research last month by *Womentechnology.co.uk* also revealed that the vast majority of women said no one was helping them to progress.



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"We posed the question: 'who is the biggest driver of your success? Is it your manager, mentor, a colleague or you,'" said Maggie Berry, director of the company.

"And 87 per cent said: 'I do it myself.'"

Wendy Hall, who chairs the BCS's women's forum, said the problem had to be tackled on a number of levels, especially because of the skills shortage as a whole.

"It is all about the culture. It hasn't changed, if anything it has got worse," she said.

"We are in the state now where there are so few women that you cannot convince others to enter an industry where there is no role for them.

"But we have to look ahead and think about the type of skills the industry will need in 10 years' time."

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## The female view: Comments from the latest reports

- "If I were interested in earning more money, a penis would help."
- "If you disagree with a male colleague you have to be really persuasive to convince the listeners that you are right."
- "It is a struggle to be taken seriously no matter what experience or qualifications are offered. It is presumed my interest is general not technical."
- "Some men have little respect for the women who

- manage them and their lack of work ethic affects the manager's reputation."
- "There was a lot of playful talk about my chest all the time, so I always covered up."
- "I need to demonstrate something a thousand times before I am taken into account."
- "There are so few women in my industry that being female is quite a novelty and gets one remembered."