



5 COMMENTS

Despite the efforts of some practices, the big picture for women in the profession remains discouraging, says Laura Mark

On 21 January more than 100,000 marched in London to protest against American president Donald Trump. Dubbed the Women's March it was just one of 576 demonstrations that took part across the globe. Although spurred on by Trump, these marches were about equality and women's rights. It is a stark reminder that, almost 100 years since the suffragette movement, women still need to fight for recognition, equal pay and equal rights.

The results of the AJ's annual Women in Architecture survey – undertaken again alongside sister-title The Architectural Review – are a stark reminder that the architectural industry is far from equal.

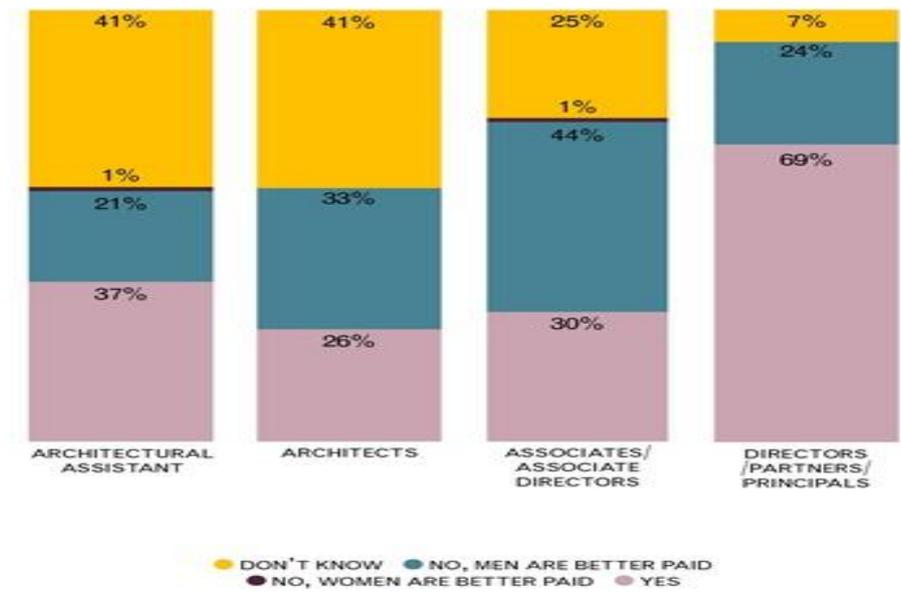
The poll of 1,277 women and 340 men paints a picture of a profession where a glass ceiling is firmly in place; women are penalised for wanting a family, and take the lion's share of responsibility for the care of dependents; and sexual discrimination and bullying are rife.

Pay

Women are consistently earning less for doing the same job as their male counterparts and, instead of improving, the gaps are widening.

According to the survey, female partners and principals of UK architecture firms take home a shocking £55,000 less than males in the same role – and according to the survey, this pay gap has widened by £42,000 in the last two years.

Do you think men and women doing the same work are paid the same by your employer?
UK women respond



‘The salaries are as far apart as chalk and cheese,’ says Woman Architect of the Year 2015 Teresa Borsuk.

Fionn Stevenson, head of Sheffield school of Architecture adds: ‘This suggests that we continue to suffer from a glass ceiling at director level for women.’

A third of women architects believe their male colleagues are being paid more for doing the same job. And the data suggests they are right. Across the survey all women working in full-time positions in practice earned less than their male counterparts doing the same job, with the pay gap increasing with seniority.

John Assael, founder of AJ100 firm Assael, agreed that the findings were ‘shocking’, and added: ‘It’s not only against the law to discriminate in this way, it is also contrary to the ARB and RIBA codes of conduct that require all architects to treat people fairly.’

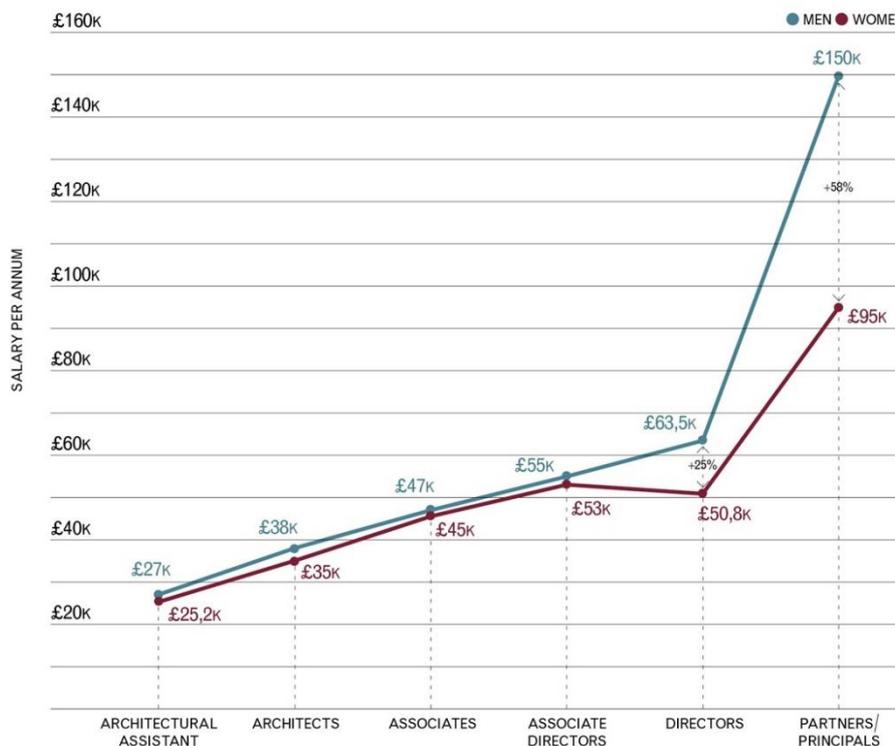
From 2018, the government will force the largest companies to publish gender pay imbalances, but this will only affect companies with more than 250 employees – just 15 of the firms in the AJ100. So what will encourage the rest to comply?

The RIBA has said it will do more to tackle firms that are not paying staff equally, but this may still fail to alter the results. According to Bruce Tether, who analysed the data from this

year's survey, 'women are more likely to work for smaller, generally lower-paying practices', so unless a pay scale is introduced across the board inequality is likely to continue.

'It is up to individuals to negotiate a pay rise based on their work and productivity,' says past RIBA president Angela Brady, 'and this is often where women lack confidence to ask for a pay rise, particularly in large practices and when women are in a minority.'

Average salaries of full-time permanent employees
UK women and men respond



Childcare

Female architects are waiting later to have children, the survey reveals. The average age of a female architect when they have their first child is 32 – four years older than the UK average.

Among associates, associate directors, directors, partners and principals, the median age at the birth of their first child is two years higher: 34.

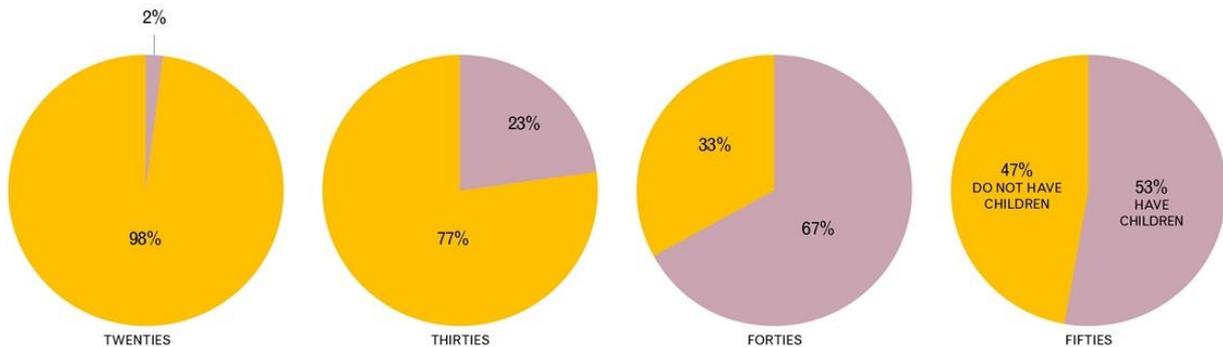
This suggests those who delay starting a family climb higher (along with those who choose not to) – 38 per cent of women directors and partners/principals do not have children).

Among women who do have children, most consider that starting a family has had a detrimental effect on their career progression.

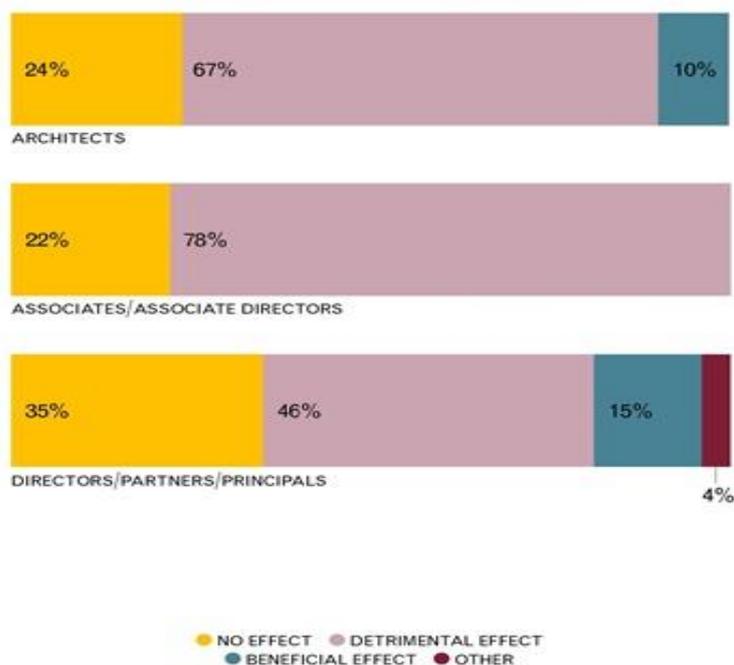
Women are certainly holding off having children until they qualify. Just 14 of the UK-based women surveyed became mothers before they qualified, and the median time between starting studies and qualifying among these women was 12.5 years. In comparison, those without children took an average of eight years to qualify.

Architecture still remains a profession where female architects feel they have to sacrifice their career in order to raise a family.

Women with and without children by age
UK women respond



What effect does having children have on career progression?
Women without children respond



‘The subject of architecture is so intense, with personal development within the field related to individual projects that can span years; it is somewhat inevitable that, for those committed to a career in architecture, children come along well into one’s 30s,’ comments shedKM director Hazel Rounding. ‘The danger is of course that individuals then advance to a position of hierarchy and it becomes difficult to think of a career break.’

In 2015, the UK government introduced new rules for parental leave aimed at sharing the burden of child-rearing, but we have yet to see what impact this has had on female architects.

According to those who took the survey, 40 per cent share the responsibility of caring for children or dependents equally, but just 8 per cent said they did less than an equal share.

‘The statistics corroborate that the combination of work and domestic responsibility continues to weigh heavily with women,’ says Borsuk.

‘Within the profession, it’s evidently still difficult to manage it all.

‘It’s a shame that the recently introduced parental leave [where fathers can share time off work after the birth/adoption of a child] does not seem to have yet made any significant difference.

‘Fathers when asked, say that they feel it will be frowned upon in their workplace; that people will assume they are not committed and that it could blight their careers.’

Recently introduced shared parental leave has not made a significant difference

Teresa Borsuk

Nevertheless, some practices are trying to tackle the problem. Make – where the median age of women going on maternity leave is 33 – operates a ‘no parent should miss a sports day’ policy, and Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners has just reduced its working day so all members of staff finish at 6pm.

‘We know that parents, regardless of whether they are architects, need to be parents,’ says Make’s HR manager, Camilla Neave. ‘It is important to us that women who work here know they don’t have to choose.’

Stevenson has called on the RIBA to do something to tackle the issue, suggesting big firms contribute to the cost of childcare for their employees.

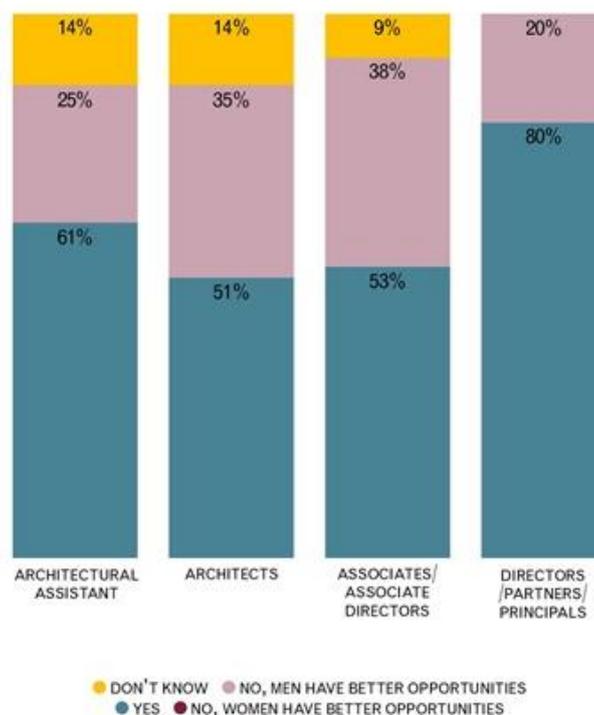
‘Childcare, childcare, childcare – it’s a deep structural issue, which remains unaddressed in this country and by our profession,’ she comments.

‘It’s unlikely to be dealt with by the present government either. I have therefore proposed to the RIBA that it asks its top 100 practices to pay 10 per cent of their profits into childcare provision for their female employees first, and male employees next, once the seniority gender imbalance has been addressed.’

Career progression

Do you think your employer provides the same opportunities for career advancement to men and women?

UK full-time permanent women employees respond



With a median age at qualification of 27, architects are relatively old when they achieve full professional status in comparison to other careers. For those not yet qualified, two-thirds of women who filled out the survey intend to qualify at some point in the future.

‘Architectural education is a long series of milestones’, says Duggan Morris co-founder Mary Duggan. ‘RIBA Part 1, practice experience, RIBA Part 2, practice experience, RIBA Part 3, then layers of promotions thereafter. There are no diversions, career options or career breaks promoted within that structure for men or women.’

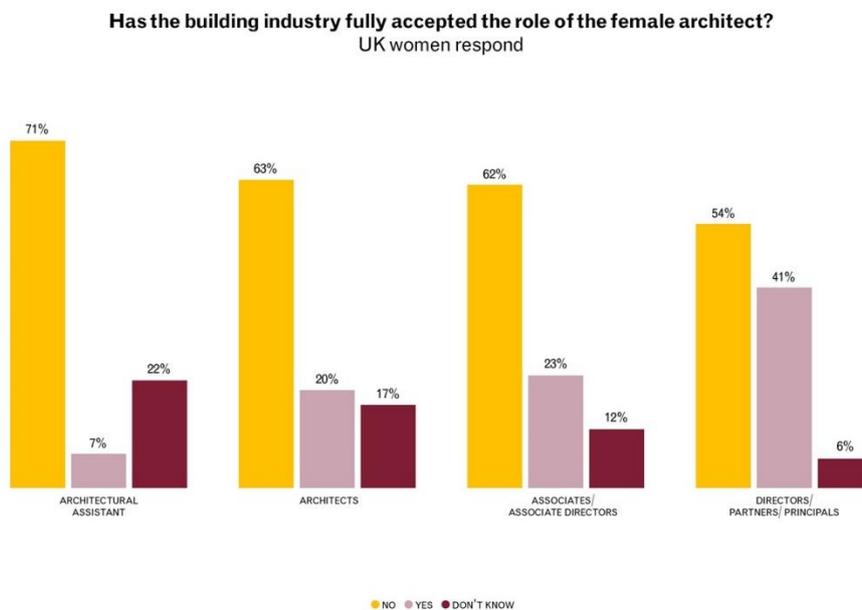
She adds: ‘It’s a very complex and strategic process and hardly surprising that female architects plan having children around these milestones. Time out from this programme just elongates an already very distant destination point. The mindset imposed by this structure

is to continue on the journey with as few interruptions as possible; to get it over and done with.'

More than a third of women architects thought their employers provided better opportunities for career advancement to men within their companies. This reduced to 20 per cent at managerial level, but across all levels no one thought women had better opportunities.

Borsuk, adds: 'The profession is still geared towards linear, rising career paths. Men are more likely to follow this traditional path whilst women, are more likely to have atypical or flexible career paths, with multiple breaks, different levels of intensity and changing roles over the course of a career.'

'This has a detrimental effect on many women, regardless of their talent, commitment, expertise and experience. It also means that women are less likely to be in positions to change these structures. The architecture industry really needs to review its structure and work practices.'



Work/life balance

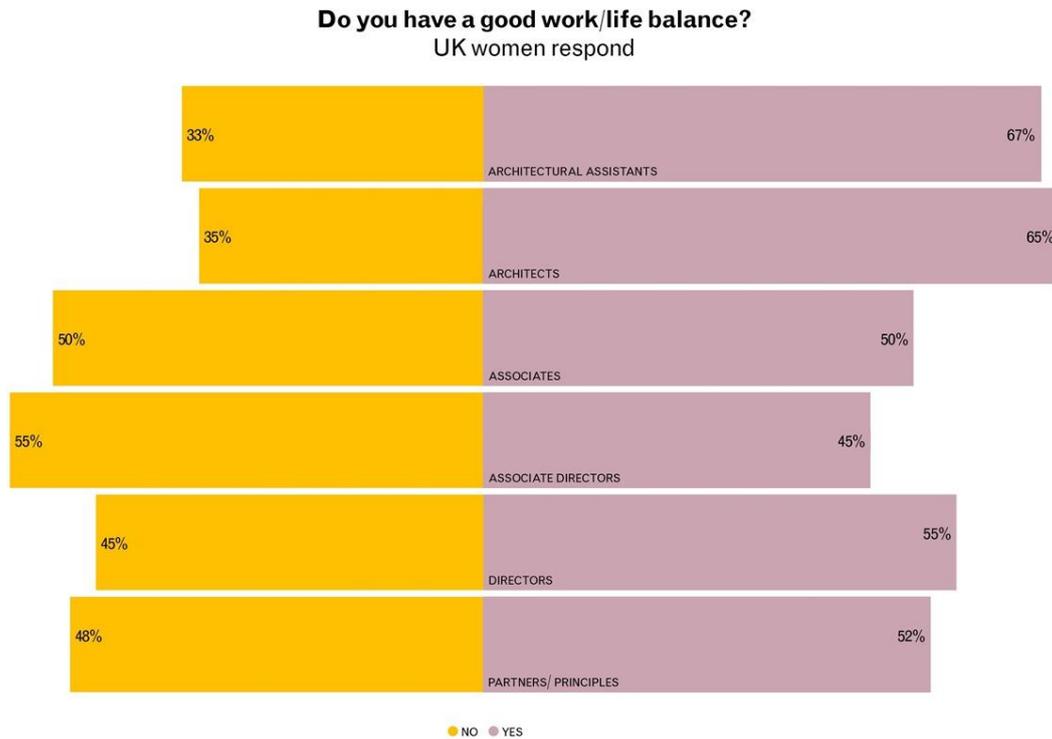
'Long hours have been a problem in architecture since college, and continue to be demanding at all levels,' says Tracy Mellor, partner at Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners.

More than a quarter blamed working long hours for their poor work/life balance while 20 per cent of UK-based women put it down to working unsociable hours, including early mornings and evenings.

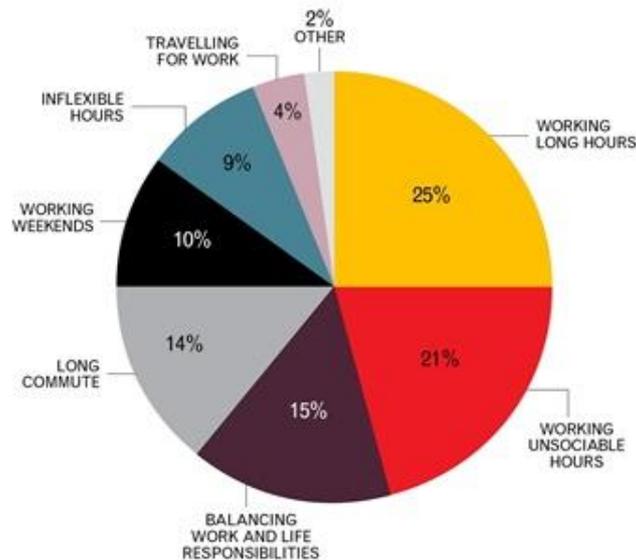
Long hours have been a problem in architecture since college

Tracy Mellor

Perhaps surprisingly, work/life balance appears to get worse as architects progress up the career ladder. Overall, two thirds of women architects and architectural assistants consider they have a good work/life balance. This declines to 50 per cent of associates, and 45 per cent of associate directors, while just over half of directors and partners/principals consider that they have a good work/life balance.



Reasons for poor work/life balance UK women respond



Women often set up on their own after having children, in order to be more flexible with their time. But the results of the survey show that of the self-employed architects that responded, those with children were less likely to report having a good work/life balance – 55 per cent said it was good compared with 63 per cent of those without kids.

Borsuk comments: 'The long-hours culture, which starts at architecture school, continues to be widespread in business; equating commitment with unflinching availability.'

'The practice of architecture is demanding and requires inordinate amounts of time and commitment. But it's also a business, and as a business it has a responsibility to manage, sustain and maintain its workforce. Surely, we must know that excessive working hours are not sustainable and that a balanced work lifestyle benefits everyone.'

'Long hours damage lives,' adds Assael, whose own practice pays overtime when architects need to work it. 'Practices should not encourage a culture that treats excessive overtime as normal behaviour.'

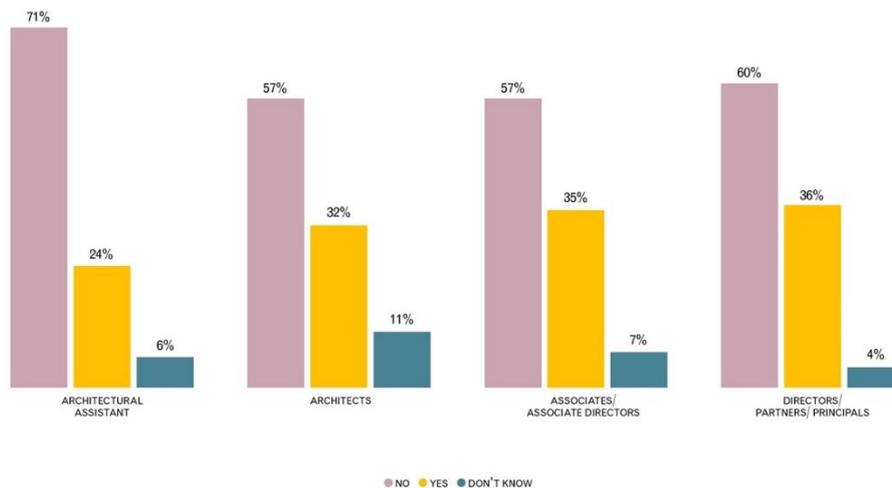
Sexual discrimination

In contrast to the worsening pay conditions there has been a marked reduction in occurrences of sexual discrimination.

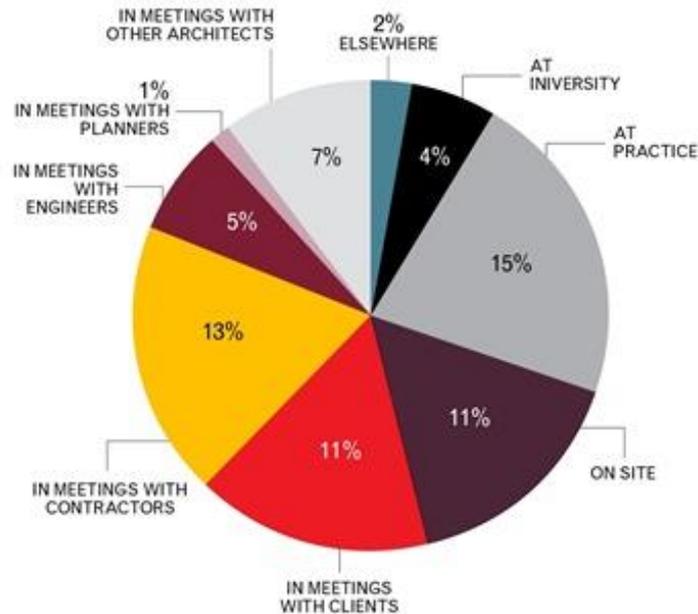
The number of female architects who say they have experienced sexual discrimination in the last year has halved from 61 per cent last year to 32 per cent in this year's survey.

The instances in practice have also declined considerably, with only 15 per cent saying that was where they had experienced discrimination compared with a huge 61 per cent last year. But practice is still the main place where architects are suffering. In comparison, 11 per cent had experienced sexual discrimination on site – the same percentage of those who had been discriminated against in client meetings – while 13 per cent said they had been victims of sexual discrimination while in meetings with contractors.

Have you suffered sexual discrimination in the last year?
UK women respond



Where did this discrimination occur? UK women respond



Women reporting sexual discrimination say it is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. However, it is notable that four in ten of those who experienced bullying in the last year were bullied by women. Almost a third of female architects report having been bullied in the last year.

Experiences include being excluded, being ignored, having meetings set up at times they cannot make, being shouted at, and being given impossible tasks.

Further analysis of the UK respondents to the survey, shows that when women constitute at least 20 per cent of the management team, the incidence of employees experiencing discrimination, bullying and harassment is half as frequent compared with similar businesses with all-male management teams.

'I am particularly concerned that instances of sexual discrimination are happening in practices,' comments RIBA president Jane Duncan.

'In a world of increased insecurity, misogyny and xenophobia, architecture must stand as a beacon of equality. These results show there is clearly much more to do. I call on every single member of our profession to play their part in stamping out inequality and blowing the whistle if they see it happening.'

These survey results are deeply worrying and should be a wake-up call

Sadie Morgan

According to dRMM co-founder Sadie Morgan, the survey results act as a 'sharp reminder that not everyone in our industry treats people equally'.

She adds: 'These survey results are deeply worrying and should be a wake-up call; an opportunity for us to really understand what is happening within our industry.'

'Only then can we make the fundamental changes necessary to close this gap rather than seeing it increase. I believe there is the will, we just need the mechanisms and focus to make it happen and without delay.'