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Student and newly qualified paramedics experiences of sexual and gender-based harassment within UK ambulance services

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Throughout the last decade there has been a spotlight on incidences and patterns of sexual and gender-based harassment within the ambulance sector globally. In the UK, an increasing number of student paramedics are reporting being subjected to harassment whilst on clinical placements. In this paper, I draw on my PhD research (at Lancaster University) in which I interviewed twenty women student or newly qualified paramedics about their experiences of gender-based violence whilst in employment or on placement. English, Welsh and Scottish ambulance services were represented in the sample. My analysis will draw on the voices of participants who spoke of a culture that normalised sexualised “banter”, inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment and in some cases violence. Students reported feeling at the bottom of a rigid hierarchy in which the senior ranks were male dominated. Most interviewees felt unable to report or challenge the behaviours they were seeing and subjected to, and the male-dominated leadership and culture was perceived as a significant obstacle to reporting, which was regarded as ineffective and potentially damaging. I will conclude by discussing participants’ suggestions for transformation.

Key words: Sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, students, UK ambulance, culture