

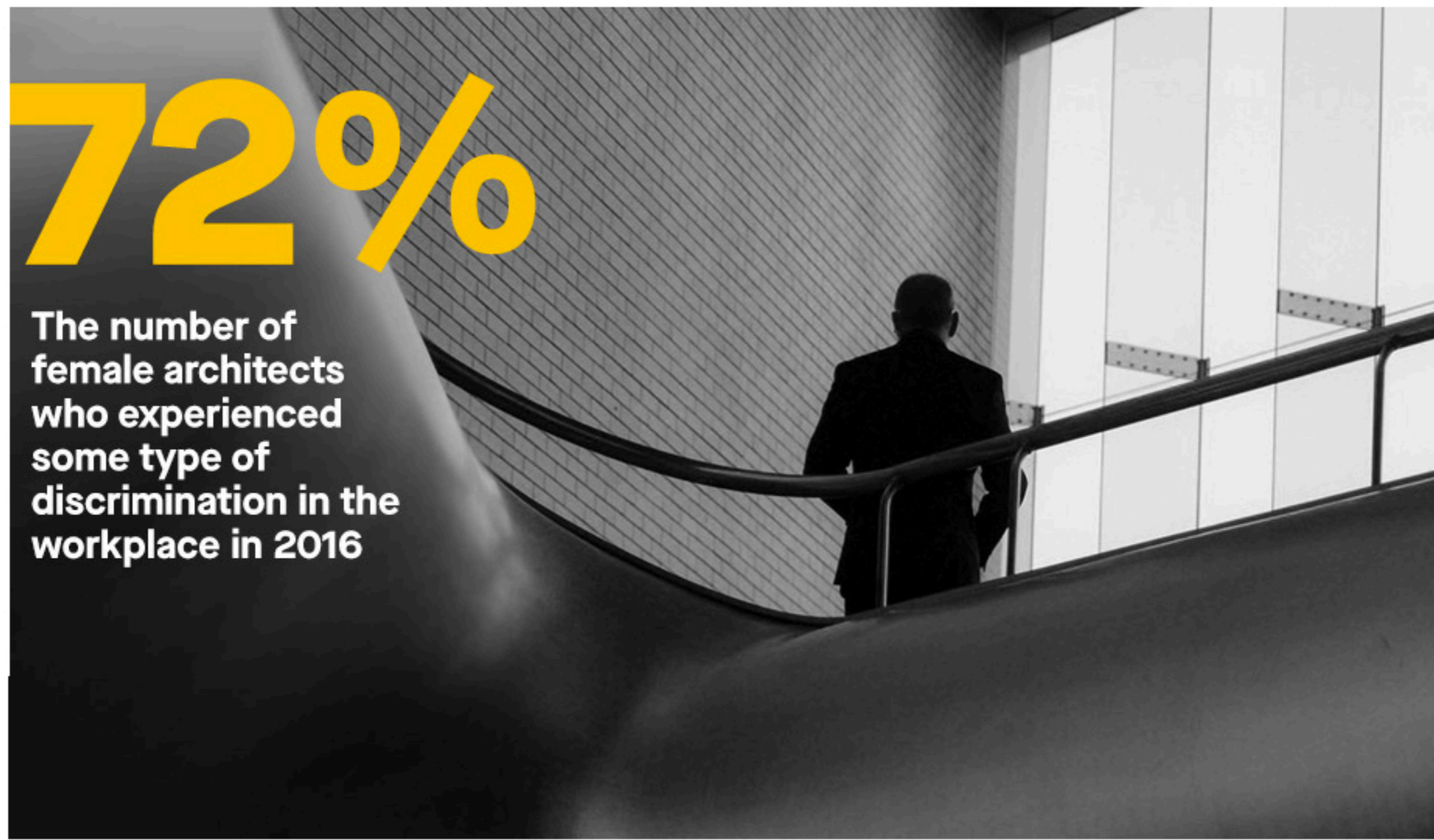
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How Are Firms Handling Sexual Misconduct in Architecture?

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It depends on who you ask, but many big practices have protocols in place to handle sexual harassment.

Until recently, architecture had long been known as an old man’s profession, a reference to how long it took (and still takes) to establish a body of work, but a reflection, too, of the degree to which men have dominated the field. In light of the sexual harassment scandals sweeping industries from entertainment to journalism to politics, architecture’s historic gender imbalance raises the question: Does it also have an unaddressed harassment problem? And if so, what are firms doing about it?

“The #MeToo movement of recent months has shown that *all* industries have work to do when it comes to combatting sexual harassment and promoting diversity and inclusion,” says Emree Siaroff, chief human resources officer at **Stantec**, the global design and engineering firm.

To gauge what the profession may or may not be doing to encourage equitable offices, *Azure* canvassed nearly a dozen of the world’s biggest firms about their fairness and harassment policies.

According to a 2016 survey by the U.K.-based *Architectural Review* of more than 1,100 female architects worldwide, 72 per cent reported that they had experienced sexual discrimination, harassment or victimization on the job, broad categories that might include everything from misogynistic attitudes to outright assault.

Among the firms that replied to *Azure*’s questions about sexual misconduct in particular, actively assembling a diverse workforce was commonly cited as a way of instilling a respectful office culture and discouraging harassment to begin with. Many firms also maintain formal behaviour guidelines and reporting mechanisms, from employee training that educates staff about discriminatory practices to protocols that take effect if sexual harassment occurs.

Toronto’s **Diamond Schmitt Architects** (DSA) has had an anti-harassment policy in effect since 2010, the year the government of Ontario passed legislation requiring employers to proactively assess the risks of workplace violence, harassment and sexual harassment. U.S.-based **Cannon Design**, which has 19 offices from Dallas to Abu Dhabi, relies on “a written policy designed to raise awareness, prevent incidents and guide reporting.”

“We want our employees to be comfortable bringing forth such a concern, so our process provides multiple avenues for reporting a complaint, including to male and female members of the Human Resources and Compliance departments,” says Patricia Beagle, director of human resources at Cannon, which has “roughly 1,000 employees” worldwide, 38 per cent of them female.

At DSA, which has a staff of 207 (110 men and 97 women, a more even – and atypical – ratio), employees are similarly encouraged to immediately report instances of harassment to superiors or – if the superior is the alleged harasser – to the HR department, providing written or eyewitness proof where possible.

“It is the responsibility of all employees to report any harassment, but it is the responsibility of the employer to pursue disciplinary action,” says Jane Sillberg, global director of human resources at **IBI Group**, the Canadian architectural services behemoth. In the highest-profile misconduct cases chronicled by the media in 2017, condemnation and retribution often came quickly, but all of the companies canvassed by *Azure* emphasized their meticulous investigative procedures.

“Our leadership delegates an Investigating Officer who is responsible for promptly and confidentially investigating all complaints of harassment and, when necessary, will immediately initiate appropriate action to stop and remedy such conduct,” says Sillberg, whose firm employs about 2,700 people. “In extreme cases where the allegations are particularly serious and/or there is a reasonable perception of bias or conflict of interest, the Investigating Officer may make recommendations for action and/or immediate disciplinary measures such as dismissal.”

At many companies, however, harassment policies also include “anti-retaliation” protocols, raising the prospect that harassers and harassed may continue working together. “Our process also includes explaining to the parties that retaliation is prohibited and explaining to a complainant that any perceived retaliation must be reported,” says Beagle at Cannon Design. “In addition, HR monitors employment-related actions such as compensation changes as part of our anti-retaliation measures.”

A number of firms have specifically mandated – at least on paper – the advancement of women, even if women continue to be in the minority as both employees and leaders. Stantec, for one, is “dedicated to helping women build confidence, expand their sphere of influence and remove obstacles and biases with the goal of providing equal opportunity for their advancement,” says the company. At the moment, though, only 13.3 per cent of its senior managers are female.

Would having more women in leadership positions result in **healthier workplaces**? Sillberg thinks so. “All leaders, regardless of gender, have the responsibility to address and eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace,” she says, noting that women account for only “20 per cent of [IBI’s] senior roles, but we are actively trying to address this gap through several internal initiatives,” including a mentorship program.

In the meantime, she adds, “having the courage to stand up for ourselves and each other [is] crucial.”

But what exactly are women “standing up” against? Like all of the professionals consulted, Lilia Kiriakou, the director of human resources at DSA, was asked if she felt architecture has a serious sexual harassment problem. “The answer would be no,” she replied, making it clear that she was speaking “only...on behalf of our firm.”

“We have not experienced cases of sexual harassment within our office,” Kiriakou said. “Is this a result of our gender balance [and] open door policy or simply a reflection of our working culture and the character of the people who work here?”

She left her own question open-ended.

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