

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Are Labour's attack ads 'gutter politics'?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

If you've spent any time on social media this Easter weekend, you probably have seen one of those ads from the Labour Party.

Do you think adults convicted of sexually assaulting children should go to prison?

Rishi Sunak doesn't.

Do you think thieves should be punished?

Rishi Sunak doesn't.

Do you think an adult convicted of possessing a gun with intent to harm should go to prison?

Rishi Sunak doesn't.

Each one out each day with a beaming Rishi Sunak in the background.

Each one designed to symbolically link Sunak, a new Prime Minister, with a record of a party with a now quite old, deep record in office.

But it is the style of these ads which has generated heat, and one in particular saying that Rishi Sunak does not believe that child sex abusers should be punished has felt near furnace.

Grandes, including David Blunkett, the former Labour Home Secretary, no meek practitioner of politics himself, has condemned it, saying he couldn't believe that his party would stoop to, in his words, the politics of the gutter.

So on today's episode of the newsagents, we will be asking the question, why?

Why is Labour doing this?

What are they hoping to achieve?

What is the risk of blowback?

Why, over a sleepy bank holiday weekend, did the gloves finally come off?

It's Lewis here, welcome to the newsagents.

So were you surprised by these ads?

Well, that's the point.

The way Labour insiders view this is that it has been an unqualified success, because five days later we're still talking about it.

They think the Tories have been doing versions of this to them for years, Labour, so the analysis goes, is just too feeble.

Of course, you're surprised.

They also reject the idea that this has legitimised dirty tactics coming their way, as one Labour source said to me, this was always going to happen anyway, we've just got there first, they say, and the Tories are just surprised that Labour has played them at their own game.

It's also revealing of jitters within Labour about Sunak himself, that right now he's an asset for the party, polling far better than the Tory party brand, trying to dissociate himself with everything that came before the youthful fixer-upper.

His face sat behind those ads, is the first stage of a wave of attempts to damage number 10's latest incumbents personally.

The local elections are looming and much rides on it for both sides, unless Labour wins big momentum will be lost just at a time when their lead is slipping a bit.

And don't think for a moment, the other side won't be responding in kind, as one Labour source put it to me, the next general election will be the most vicious in modern history.

Two men who have said they prize integrity, doing everything they can to destroy the other.

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So we're going to get into this, and just a word of warning, there will be a point for reasons which will become clear where strong language is used, and if that's not a reason to keep listening then I don't know what it is.

Who better to talk about it, in full, than the man whose brain-childish campaign it allegedly was, Close Starmer Ally and Shadow Justice Secretary MP for Croydon North, Steve Reid.

Steve, welcome to the news agents.

Is that right?

Was this your idea of this campaign?

Well, I don't oversee campaigns, that's the Labour Party headquarters that does that, but I'm the Shadow Justice Secretary.

So we spotted the data that was showing how the Conservatives were failing to properly punish offenders for a number of crimes.

So that we passed on to the party, the party then generated a campaign around it.

Did you authorise the particular wording and the particular image?

No, no, it doesn't work like that, we don't sign them off in that respect, we provide the information.

But the key point underlying this is that I felt outraged when I saw the numbers of people using guns or child abusers that were getting away without proper punishment.

So that bit was your idea?

Well, that's what I found, and you follow politics, I'm sure many of your listeners and viewers do as well.

We've been challenging Dominic Raab over some of this in the House of Commons for months now and he just gives us flannel.

But you didn't see the actual image that was about to go out before it went out?

Just before it went out, yeah.

So you saw it before it went out?

Yeah, before it went out, yes.

And you had no problems with it, you thought this was perfectly legitimate?

Oh, I think it's wholly legitimate.

I think it's an important part of politics to hold politicians to account for what they've done.

Now, the leader of the Conservative Party is accountable for the behaviour of the Conservative government that's been in power for 13 years.

So I think it's important that we explain to voters, to the public, what the government is doing wrong, so the public can then take no view.

Well, come on to that.

Well, come on to that.

But I mean, just before we do.

I mean, did you talk about it with Keir Starmer?

Did Keir Starmer authorise it?

The Labour Party has its own sign-off procedures and it's the campaign team.

So, you know, we have Shadow Cabinet with Keir every week.

So he would have known it.

Yeah.

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He would have known it.

And have you been, obviously, it's been unfolding over the course of the Easter weekend.

Have you been surprised by the extent to which it has generated so much attention?

Well, we hoped that it would catch the public's attention because, you know, what it's saying is quite damning, a damning indictment of the government's failure.

But I think it's fair to say, if you had said to me, do you think it will get over 25 million views over the weekend, I would have been very, very surprised by that.

Do you think political...

Yeah, that's what's happened.

The one that has received most attention was the first one.

Under the Tories, 4,500 adults convicted of sexually assaulting children under 16 served no prison time.

Just remind me, who decides whether or not a child sexual offender goes to prison?

That decision is taken in a court, but the framework within which the courts operate is set by the government.

So let me give you an example.

We've been raising issues around rape a lot recently because barely one in 100 reported rapes ever comes to trial.

The court will bring forward a seven-year minimum sentence for rape.

This government is in power and they could have set higher minimum standards for child rape, child abuse, and they chose not to.

So it is legitimate to hold them to account for that.

So just for people, in case people aren't aware, because obviously it's quite obscure, really, there's no reason people would be aware.

The three groups that really decide this are Parliament because they ultimately set the set.

Parliament is such a legislative framework.

Judges, an individual judge, making a decision on the basis of the framework and the sentencing guidelines which are, among other things, or other bodies, partly adjudicated and set by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Now just to remind me, who used to run the Crown Prosecution Service?

The role of the...

Because I know I've been looking...

Who used to run the Crown Prosecution Service?

I think you know.

Well, I've just...

It's Keir Star.

I've been looking at the commentary, some of the commentary that the Conservatives have been putting out in particular.

The sentencing council exists to ensure consistency across the courts.

It doesn't set the sentences, the maximum and minimum sentences are set by Parliament.

Sure.

And what the Conservatives are trying to do is pretend it's nothing to do with them.

They've been trying to claim that the judiciary is fully independent of Parliament.

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It isn't.

Did Keir Star...

The judiciary operates within guidelines, frameworks, set by members of the law.

Yes, but in the beginning, you know, Keir Starmer, when he was on the sentencing council, did he try and make those sentencing guidelines tougher?

That isn't what the sentencing council does, you know?

This is the trap.

The Conservatives have set that they're hoping people will fall into to cover up what they've failed to do.

The sentencing council ensures consistency across the courts.

If the government thinks child rapists should go to jail, as I think most of the public think, they could have enacted legislation to do that.

Now, we've already come forward with a minimum sentence of seven years for rape.

We have underway right now a sentencing review, and in government, we will appoint a senior member of the judiciary to look at the wider framework for legislation and sentencing and punishment.

Will you commit to ensure that no person who is convicted of child sexual assault is let off without prison time?

Will you ensure that they all go to prison?

Because that's basically the tenor of what you're saying, that people are being let off, it's too lenient.

So will you commit to that?

It doesn't say that, though, does it?

It doesn't say we would lock all of them up.

Oh, come on, Steve.

Come on, Steve.

Come on, Steve.

It doesn't say we would lock all of them up.

But you're criticising them, and you've just done so.

You've criticised them for being too lenient on these people.

So are you going to be...

You're going to be tougher, are you?

Well, we're going to have a sentencing review to see how the whole system is working.

The Conservatives have failed to do that.

That's why you've only got 1% of reported rapes ever getting to court.

But you're talking about rape, we're talking...

It's why...

You have brought up child sexual assault, child sexual assault.

We've put a whole range of crimes to it, so a whole range of crimes, including robbery.

This is a government that is totally soft on crime.

Shall I tell you something that the ads also don't say, is that in 2018 the majority of offenders were sentenced to immediate custody for child rape offences.

The average sentence for an adult is three years and eight months.

And this is what I mean about honesty and straightforwardness.

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To look at that, you would think that basically the government doesn't care, that Rishi Sunak doesn't care.

These are your words about sending child sexual abusers to prison.

If he does, why hasn't he done anything about these statistics?

So of that 4,500 child sexual abusers who did not go to prison, 2,000 of them just over got a community sentence.

You could have put out an ad which said, the Labour Party is going to lock up more child sexual offenders.

Fine.

And you're saying that Rishi Sunak doesn't care about it.

That's just gutter politics.

It's a lie.

Of course he cares about it.

You know he cares about it.

He is the prime minister.

He is the prime minister who is responsible for this government, the leader of the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party has broken the criminal justice system end to end.

They took 22,000 police off our streets.

They closed courts.

They have allowed a situation where only 1% of reported rapes ever even gets the court and the average delay for a trial for those 1% is now three years, which means half of them wait longer than three years.

If you go to prison, you are more likely to leave prison addicted to drugs than go into prison addicted to drugs.

If this was a government that cared about punishing criminals, those facts would not exist and under Labour they will not because we will prevent crime with more police.

We will punish criminals by locking them up where that is appropriate and we will protect communities in the way that this Conservative government has failed to do.

You have seen, of course, what David Blunkett, the former Labour Home Secretary, said about this ad.

He said, when I heard yesterday about a tweet from the Labour Party's official account suggesting that Rishi Sunak was somehow responsible for failing to lock up criminals who would abuse children, I immediately thought my party is better than this.

What would you say to David Blunkett?

Well, he's entitled to his view.

I happen to disagree.

He is, but I respect David immensely, but on this one I disagree with him and I strongly suspect and I've listened to some phone ins over the bank holiday weekend as well.

Most members of the public think child rapists should be in prison.

Most members of the public think that when they phone the police they should come to resolve a problem.

When you've cut the police as the Conservatives have done and only 4% of robbers, 6% of burglars are ever prosecuted, people actually think twice about phoning the police.

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I've got a constituent who told me his elderly brother was outside the house, a car pulled up carrying a bag, a car pulled up, somebody got out, smacked him around the head with a knuckle duster.

It was caught on CCTV and they phoned the police and the police never came.

Is that acceptable?

What's the difference between Boris Johnson criticising Keir Starmer for failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile and you criticising Rishi Sunak for failing to imprison child rapists because in both cases someone else is making the decision?

The situation here is you've got a government that has broken the criminal justice system. It's not by act of God that the criminal justice system doesn't work.

You and others accuse Boris Johnson at the time of gaslighting people of dragging politics into the gutter.

Ask you again, what is the difference between Boris Johnson criticising Starmer for failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile when he wasn't in charge of making those decisions and Labour criticising Rishi Sunak for not imprisoning child rapists?

Because we have a government here that is responsible for the criminal justice system for end to end that is broken.

The DPP does not take decisions on behalf of every single prosecutor in the Crown Prosecution Service.

The government is responsible for setting the framework for the criminal justice system.

The Conservatives took the police off the streets, they closed the courts, they allowed the prisons to turn into colleges of crime and we saw how much they broke the probation system when we saw Zara Alina's murderer allowed out a prison without appropriate supervision because the probation system is broken, he then went out and committed that most atrocious of murders that members of the public will be very aware of.

The Conservatives have destroyed the criminal justice system, it is our responsibility to let the public know about that.

Let me just read you something from, you know the blog, The Secret Barrister.

So this is a Barrister who writes about criminal justice system and he's written about why your campaign is bogus saying that it is just completely off the mark.

He said there are difficult and unattractive scenarios to imagine why a child sexual offender might not go to prison but the courts have to deal with them every day.

An 18-year-old asking a 15-year-old over Snapchat for a cheeky picture, a 20-something with severe learning disabilities who touches a leg of a teenage boy on a bus, a young man with severe autism and ADHD who begins communicating online with a self-styled pedophile hunter posing as a 14-year-old, all serious cases, all offences engaging in, inciting or attempting to incite sexual activity with a child, all worthy of prosecution, all in need of a sentence that protects the public.

But does that sentence always need to be prison?

You're not going to lock those people up either.

In many circumstances there will be offenders there who should have gone to prison and have not.

What, those ones there, an 18-year-old asking a 15-year-old over Snapchat for a cheeky picture?

Dominic Robb has instructed the judiciary to stop sending convicted offenders to prison

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because they've run out of prison places after the Conservative government got rid of 10,000 cells.

Now, it is important that the public are aware of what the government is doing to our criminal justices.

I think this is the problem with the ad, is that there's lots of legitimacy in what you're saying, but you also know, and this is what your critics think that you've just sort of run afoul of here, you also know that the world is complicated, that the criminal justice system is full of complexity, and A, the idea that Rushdie Sunak doesn't care about these things, and B, that that system would be any different under you is just nonsense and you know it.

It's cynical.

It's like the 350 million on the side of the bus.

It was a good line, it got people talking, but ultimately, it was facile.

I'll tell you why.

I don't think Rushdie Sunak cares about the state of the criminal justice system because you know, there's not much to praise Liz Truss for, but one of the things she did was she removed Dominic Robb as justice secretary and as Lord Chancellor.

Rushdie Sunak brought him back.

He is the man who has overseen the failure.

He's more responsible for the current state of our criminal justice system.

Rushdie Sunak has been prime minister for six months and MP since 2015, or the guy who used to literally be the director of public prosecutions.

It's Rushdie Sunak because the CPS, the Crown Prosecution Service, operates within the framework and works with a criminal justice system for which the government is responsible.

Evette Cooper hasn't, your Shadow Home Secretary hasn't commented about this, have you talked about it with her?

I haven't yet.

I think she's been away on holiday for the weekend.

Is she behind it?

As far as you're aware, there have been lots of speculation that she hasn't.

Well, you know, there's been briefings, but I think you can dismiss them.

The real issue here that we all care about, and Evette and I and Keir, all of us, have been working very closely together.

We were all together at the speech Keir gave up in Stoke about Labour's ambitious mission to make our streets safer.

And to make our politics full of integrity.

We're all absolutely united on that.

Evette came up with the policy to put 13,000 extra police back on our streets funded by tying up procurement across the different police forces.

If we had those police on the streets, we could stop an awful lot more of the crime that is going on.

So, you know, off the record, briefings, I dismiss them as so much hot air.

I know that we'll work closely together on this agenda.

Well, you talk about off the record briefings, the papers, as you know, have been fully over

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the weekend.

One particularly struck me when being asked to justify this ad campaign.

One Labour source was quoted as saying, Soonak never condemned Johnson when he accused Keir of letting Saval off the hook.

So fuck him.

Is that what Labour's reduced to now really?

Is that the Labour Party that we can expect in government?

That is not the kind of language that I would want anyone to use.

I actually think in a democracy where you've got two parties, it is essential that the opposition points out the failures of the government.

In a misleading way.

Not in a misleading way.

Those stats are from the MOJ, the government itself.

I'd stand by those statistics on all of those issues that we've raised them on, including carrying guns and threatening people with them, including robbery and burglary, as well as child abuse.

This is not a government that is punishing people for the crimes they commit.

And of those 2,000 people convicted of child sexual abuse and got given a community sentence, many of them will never have had to carry that out.

So they got away with doing nothing.

I've raised that directly in the House of Commons with Dominic Raab.

He's done absolutely nothing.

Is that the action of a government that cares?

It's going to be a dirty campaign in the next election, isn't it, Steve?

It's going to be a campaign where Labour will be making the case for how we will make the country safer when the Conservatives have broken the criminal justice system.

Steve Reid, Shadow Justice Secretary, thank you very much.

My pleasure.

Right, while something tells me we will be returning to our political culture a lot in the months ahead, it's not back to kid gloves just because Boris Johnson has gone.

After the break, though, we're going to be turning to a different sort of culture and cultural problem, something truly shocking about surgery and the NHS's Me Too moment.

Just after this.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

So today is the first day of the latest junior doctor strike, four days of chaos ahead for the NHS.

But there was another NHS story over the weekend which will get less attention but is no less impactful.

There was an extraordinary piece in The Times magazine on Saturday by Rachel Sylvester, one of their columnists, entitled, Sexist Surgeons Face Their Me Too Moment.

It was a remarkable account of senior male surgeons using their almost demigod status where few questioned them to create a misogynistic culture where sexual assault against younger female members of the profession is commonplace.



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But more than that, where the system remains unreformed, designed by men for men to advance. Right, well we're fortunate enough to have Rachel Sylvester on the show, the author of the piece, alongside someone she features promptly in the piece itself, Roshanna Median-Staffel, orthopedic surgeon who has raised concerns about the environment in NHS operating theatres. Rachel is an extraordinary piece.

What was the genesis of it?

I actually spoke to a surgeon who'd left surgery because she'd been so disillusioned and had found it so difficult to combine work and family life as a surgeon.

And I then started digging around and talking to people and just was really shocked by what I found speaking to people like Roshanna and other surgeons.

It's just shocking that these incredibly brilliant, highly trained women are being treated in this way, the sort of mixture of crude banter, sexual assault in some cases, but also an impossibility of juggling their work with their family lives.

But it's also really shocking as a patient because you are, when you're on the operating table under general anaesthetic, at your most vulnerable.

You assume that everyone there has your best interests at heart and everybody else's best interests at heart.

And the idea that there might actually be sexual predators in surgery is really frightening.

Because that's one of the key elements of the piece, right, is that things are occasionally being said or even done potentially to patients, patients who are under a general anaesthetic.

Well, certainly things have been said in the presence of patients under a general anaesthetic. Such as what?

What sort of, if anyone hasn't read the piece, what's the tenor of that?

Well, for instance, one surgeon said to me, you know, that she'd heard her colleagues saying things like, oh, she could have shaved for us, referring to pubic hair.

I haven't got any firsthand accounts of sexual assault of patients, but if you've got sexual predators really attacking other doctors, other surgeons, just outside the operating theatre, that's pretty frightening.

And then the problem is that they're not being called up about it.

We're not obviously here at Roshana's story, but in terms of you spoke to other people as well, just give us a sense of what they said to you, and particularly on that point around sexual assault or sexual transgression within operating theatres and so on.

What sort of things are happening?

I spoke to one surgeon called Philippa Jackson, who described a really appalling experience.

So a male colleague came up to her when they were just preparing for an operation and gave her a hug and he said, I expect you felt my erection then.

And he also said he could see down her top.

Then later that evening, he came up to her again and offered to tie up her gown.

And he said, now I've got permission to tie you up anywhere.

And he kissed the back of her neck.

She just felt so uncomfortable, but they were about to go into an emergency operation.

And she just felt incredibly uncomfortable.

But when she raised concerns about that with her superiors at the hospital, nothing was done. And in fact, it was suggested to her that maybe they should be dealt with informally

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rather than through formal channels.

And she then insisted that there should be a proper inquiry, but nothing happened to the colleague who had done this to her.

And she left and then she didn't, you know, but she was deeply traumatised understandably by this experience.

And Rachana, do you think that this sort of experience, both in your own experience, but obviously in terms of what you hear from fellow surgeons, that this is common?

I think it's fairly common.

The amount of contacts I get almost on a weekly basis from other female surgeons asking me what they should do, telling me their own stories.

And I mean, it's unreal.

You wouldn't believe the amount of contacts I get, the amount of messages, phone calls, phone calls from parents, phone calls from colleagues who are concerned for their colleagues. And many of them are to do with sexual harassment or bullying.

So it's very common.

And we talk about it quite a lot between ourselves within the female surgical community or even the female medical community, not just surgeons, but it's an unsaid wider public conversation.

I don't think we've had that as much purely because people are quite frightened to talk about their own experiences, particularly trainees.

I mean, this is obviously could be happening across the wider NHS, but is there something specific about surgery and surgeons, which has led to this being so common?

The NHS in general and surgery is a very hierarchical environment.

Some people argue it needs to be because of the way patient care is prioritised.

And as a chain of command, I suppose, the worst stories come from the surgical field.

And it's likely because it's quite quite high pressure field.

Certain types of personalities historically went into it.

But also, you know, there's just more men, it's much more male dominated.

You know, I would say, again, it's happened to me many times, particularly in my more junior career, and only really in the last few years where I've worked in really lovely departments with excellent male colleagues, and have I felt comfortable enough to talk about it.

And Rachel knows that I was really anxious, even despite that, to say something, but felt I should given the position I have where people come to me asking for advice.

I thought it's time some people speak out.

It's happened to you many times in your career.

Yeah, I wouldn't say in the last few years, as I said, I've worked with wonderful people the last few years, but from medical school, all the way through my more junior training, certainly, you know, quite often, yeah.

And that's pretty recent then, right?

I mean, you're 37.

So we're talking about over the last 10 years, 10 plus years that this, I mean, people will be surprised, I think.

Yeah.

So I would say, you know, up until I was about 27, 28, it was pretty frequent.

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I think something maybe about me changed after that.

So more senior surgeons making uncomfortable propositions towards you in the operating theatre and elsewhere?

Yeah.

I wouldn't say much happened in the operating theatre itself, but with the operating theatre, you know, whether it was on wards, whether it was in clinics, in other environments.

So just towards the end of my medical school training, I was sent away on a placement for four weeks, and I was under a surgeon there, very senior surgeon, actually, and he was doing very odd things, like calling me into his office, putting his hand on my leg, saying very strange things to me about wanting to read me and not being able to read me, things like this, and calling me an enigma, et cetera.

He would start going in his car to a satellite clinic and in the car, I'd put his hand on my leg again.

And actually, at the time, his registrar, who was a male, spotted that he was acting quite, you know, strange with me.

And on one journey to a clinic, the registrar said, oh, no, I'll take her, because he'd realised, and I was kind of looking pleadingly at him to make sure that, you know, this went through, and the consultant kept insisting that I went in his car, and the registrar managed to make some sort of excuse to get me away, and I went in the registrar's car. But, you know, even the registrar had noticed, but he was in a position that he couldn't formally do anything.

He was just trying to get me away from the situation, and later on, the day I was leaving, he messaged me and said, I'm going to come and say, bye, I'm going to come to your accommodation,

which was a hospital accommodation, so it was not far from his office.

And I was terrified that if he'd, you know, come into my accommodation, what would happen? So I just threw everything I had into a bag and just drove off, I was just absolutely terrified.

But things happened, you know, I've explained to Rachel, people coming into sleuths rooms, you know, kind of where you put waste away on the wards and grinding themselves on me or making comments about things I was wearing or, you know, physical assets or features as it were.

You know, and that was certainly when I was more junior, that was really common, really common.

Do you think it still is?

From what I get told, it's certainly common, still among surgical juniors, and it's often in some places rather than others.

So as I said, I've worked in some hospitals in the last few years, where the departments were so wonderful, my male colleagues were so wonderful, I can't imagine it happening. So, you know, when I compare that to other hospitals I've been in, where it did happen to me, the environments were quite different, so it's very dependent on the individuals I suppose that you're around.

One of the things I was told was that more than half of female surgeons have experienced some kind of harassment or abuse or assault.

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I mean, that is terrifying and stunning and appalling.

You know, brilliant people like Roshana shouldn't have to put up with that.

And that's then, you know, it's become sort of almost part of the cultural norm and Roshana talks about the sort of boys club mentality in surgery, which is somehow enabling this, their more pernicious behaviour.

I was going to say, the reasons for this being so common, with doctors, but with surgery in particular really interests me, I was trying to think about why there is, I mean, is it because the surgeons in particular, it is so opaque, you know, we do sort of elevate certain doctors, but particularly surgeons, they're sort of demigods, aren't they really? We meet them and we see them when we're very vulnerable, we assume they must be deeply ethical, almost kind of, you know, excellent, pristine versions of ourselves.

Exactly.

They're the absolute top of the medical tree, aren't they?

And medicine, the NHS is very hierarchical.

But surgery, I mean, the figures are stunning about how male dominated it is.

So there are more women than men going through medical school, but only 15% of consultant surgeons, women, and 8% in some specialties like orthopedics, which Roshanna works in.

So there's a male dominated culture, unreformed in some ways.

But then also, I think when people do make complaints, it's not dealt with.

So there's a sort of people get away with it.

So it's a sort of combination of it's still being so male dominated, the sort of the way that we historically look at surgeons, and then the NHS itself not having the right procedures in place to deal with it.

And it's quite opaque as well, isn't it?

So if you think about politics, how male dominated that was 20 years ago when I started writing about it.

And now, because partly a light's been shone on it, that there are many more women and this kind of behaviour is called out much more easily.

But in surgery, it feels as if it's brushed under the carpet, and that's why people continue to get away with it.

That's exactly what it reminded me of in terms of politics, with the piece.

And one of the most extraordinary things I found about the piece, leaving the sort of sexual assault side to one side, was just the fact that, for example, surgical instruments are still basically made for men.

Lewis, it's a much bigger conversation.

It's about a system and a career that was designed for men.

And that system and that training programme throws so many obstacles in the way of women that it makes it much more difficult for women to succeed.

The response to this piece has been pretty extraordinary, the sort of cascade of other people coming forward.

And there's been talk of this being a watershed moment for surgery, a sort of me too moment maybe for surgery.

Do you think that's what it could be, what it should be, what it needs to be?

I hope so.

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I mean, I think the response on Twitter over the weekend after the piece came out was really extraordinary and dozens of women supporting the surgeons, including Roshana, who had spoken out in the piece, but also sharing their own experiences of, in some cases, assault and also discrimination.

And I think that I hope it is a tipping point.

It shouldn't be a kind of endurance test to become a surgeon.

One of the things that really shocked me is that there's a higher miscarriage rate among female surgeons because they're under so much stress, higher infertility rates.

It shouldn't be a choice between family and your career to become a surgeon and it shouldn't be almost impossible for women to juggle it.

And I think until there's more balance in the profession, you're going to have this sort of problems of the culture as well.

And there has to be some kind of transformative moment.

And I think the people at the top have to take much more action.

They can't just sit by.

I love that, you know, there's the enthusiasm for it being a watershed moment, but I'm not holding my breath.

I've been talking about this, not the sexual harassment, but all of the other things for over a decade, I have been constantly banging my head against a wall.

And I've asked the organisations that run our training, that are representative organisations to change the system, you know, to make big change.

And you know, there's a lot of words, there's a lot of piecemeal action, but nothing robust enough where that someone's taking the bull by the horns and changing the entire system.

And that's what I want to see in, you know, and Rachel knows I sent a message, a tweet to Amanda Pritchard, and I said, you know, can you help us?

Because I've spoken to everyone else.

And the system, the training system is so big and complex and antiquated that it really does need someone right at the top to say, OK, we have to prioritise this, we need to make change however hard it's going to be.

And that's what I want to see, to be honest, but I'm not holding my breath.

I think the people in power and influence in the NHS were quite shocked by this piece actually because the Royal College of Surgeons of England put out a statement on the Saturday saying that the things that Roshana and others have experienced were completely unacceptable.

And then on Monday, over the bank holiday, both Amanda Pritchard, the head of the NHS and Steve Barclay, the health secretary, promised to take action.

So but I think for people like Roshana and the others who I spoke to, just those warm words aren't enough.

They need something to change.

Rachel, Roshana, thank you so much, been really, really fascinating.

Thanks so much.

Thank you.

Thank you.

We should just say what the NHS has said about this.

Amanda Pritchard, who has been mentioned, you've heard, chief executive of the NHS in

**[Transcript] The News Agents / Are Labour's attack ads 'gutter politics'?**

England has said that senior doctors and managers must do more to stamp out misogyny in operating theatres.

There should be no place in the NHS, she said, for sexism or harassment.

I urge anyone subjected to this treatment to speak up.

This is The News Agents.

Right, that's it for today.

John and Emily should be back from their extended Easter egg hunt in the Epping Forest by tomorrow,

so assuming they are back safely, we and the rest of the team will see you then.

Bye bye.

This has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.