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Secretaries asked to darn bosses' trousers, survey shows

***Secretaries are bullied, undervalued and asked by their boss to perform inappropriate tasks such as sewing up a trouser seam, walking a dog or helping with a child's homework, according to new research.***

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A survey of 1,000 secretaries and personal assistants found that more than a third had been asked by their boss to do something that went "beyond the call of duty".

One secretary had to bathe her boss's elderly mother, another was asked to make curtains and one respondent said she had to hold her boss's hand on a car journey.

The report, by Professor Katie Truss of Kingston University and Rosemary Parr of training firm Global PA Network, said a new qualification was needed to improve the status of secretaries.

Ms Parr said: "The perception of the role is stuck in a time warp from 40 or 50 years ago when secretaries were seen as surrogate wives or housekeepers.

"Now they are more like management assistants - they need to be their managers' second brain, anticipating what their bosses want next as well as doing what they want now, but what our research has shown is that they are not getting the recognition for it."

Professor Truss said the job of a secretary had changed dramatically over the years. Few did audio typing or used shorthand while more than a third manage financial budgets or other staff and a quarter deputised for their manager.

This increase in responsibilities was reflected in a change in job title, with only one in 10 called secretary, most using the title personal or executive assistant.

More than a third of secretaries have some form of higher education, compared to 10 per cent in 1992, said the report.