

Gender Disparity in Medical Field

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Approximate total population of Pakistan in 2021 was 225 million, out of which 48.6% are female and 51.4% are males. But it is not reflected in Medical college's admissions and almost 60 to 70% women opt for medical profession and it is creating disparity. Medical profession has become less lucrative for males just because of a lack of job opportunities available after doing MBBS and relatively there are more opportunities after commerce, accounts, engineering and social sciences. Therefore, boys are attracted towards these subjects instead. Females are more attracted towards medical profession because after an MBBS degree a girl can find more and good marriage proposals¹. Secondly, she could be a helping hand for her husband after marriage in this era of inflation. Gender disparity is an ancient problem and way back in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) era females born were buried alive but Islam gave huge respect and priority to females. Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) in his preaching directed us to render due respect to females. Unfortunately we are not following it in true letter and spirit.

Female medical professionals often encounter a disparity in Pakistani healthcare system during their service. A recent study in a tertiary care hospital in Pakistan identified issues of gender bias faced by female surgeons/doctors throughout their careers in the form of lack of respect, barriers to recruitment and promotion, and differences in training in the operating room and other occasions. The majority of female surgeons/physicians believe that these experiences have a significant impact on their career choices, job satisfaction, and access to higher status. Female doctors are underestimated as leaders. For example, in one of the surgical units of a renowned institutes there was the only one female professor was working, even though 34.4% of her residents were female. In Pakistan, only 30% of Women Doctors continue their career². Women are considered stay-at-home moms and are responsible for all household chores, while men are assigned the role of the sole breadwinner of the family. Ambitious and career-oriented women in Pakistan are usually discouraged and such women are not socialized. This traditional, overprotective mentality is also prevalent in the healthcare field³. Even the country's top residential programs fail to provide working mothers with basic facilities such as day care, maternity leave, maternity care during early birth period. As a result of these social pressures and the rigors of the workplace make it tough for females to balance their personal and professional lives, with most leaving their careers to meet society's definition of the "ideal housewife". Moreover, if a woman who chooses to continue her professional career, these submissive roles affect her efficiency in the workplace and, as a result her professional skill are not superior to those of her peers³. Increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions is one of the most important steps in closing the gender gap in medical profession. Not only does this create a healthier and better working environment for other female doctors, but these female leaders also become role models for young female doctors and medical students. This encourages female physicians to pursue competitive medical fields such as general surgery, neurosurgery, and cardiac surgery and become more career-oriented⁴.

In summary, large, evidence-based studies are essential to identify and recognize the challenges that women doctors face throughout their careers and in reaching top positions so that each issue can be adequately addressed. . There is a need to introduce relatively flexible staffing policies for health professionals, especially for working mothers, to address work-life balance issues. National organizations and organizations should match female medical students with mentors and icons who are not only a source of inspiration but also provide networking opportunities.

Females are usually reluctant to report incidents of gender inequality because of stigmatization. Awareness-raising strategies are needed to put in place appropriate SOPs for a work environment that is more conducive and approachable for women health workers and provides equal leadership opportunities for all. Government of Pakistan is now making positive efforts to curb the gender inequality and one of the practical step is the creation of female ombudsman office to tackle workplace harassment cases. Other legislative measures are also in national assembly and senate of Pakistan.

How to Cite This:

Tipu SA. Gender Disparity in Medical Field. *Isra Med J.* 2022; 14(3): 93-94. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55282/imj.ed61>

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Received for Publication: December 29, 2022

1st Revision of Manuscript: January 02, 2023

Accepted for Publication: January 13, 2022