

Gender Disparity in Medical Specializations: The Overrepresentation of Female Doctors in Gynecology and the Need for Diversification in Pakistan: Review Study

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Abstract

In Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), cultural and religious norms often restrict women from seeking medical treatment from male doctors, especially in sensitive specialties. Despite this, a disproportionate number of female doctors choose gynecology over other critical fields such as surgery, diabetology, hematology, orthopedics, and urology. This paper examines the factors driving this trend, including societal expectations, institutional biases, and lack of mentorship in non-traditional specialties. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys of female medical students and practitioners with an analysis of specialization trends in KPK hospitals. The findings reveal that while cultural restrictions necessitate more female doctors in all specialties, systemic barriers discourage women from pursuing non-gynecological fields. Policy recommendations include targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns to encourage female doctors to diversify their specializations.

Keywords: Female doctors, medical specialization, gender disparity, gynecology, Pakistan, KPK

Introduction

In Pakistan, women face significant barriers in accessing healthcare due to cultural and religious norms that discourage them from consulting male doctors, particularly in specialties requiring physical examinations (Sathar et al., 2020). This has led to a high demand for female physicians across all medical fields. However, despite this need, a large proportion of female

doctors in Pakistan specialize in gynecology and obstetrics, while other critical specialties—such as surgery, diabetology, clinical hematology, orthopedics, and urology—remain male-dominated (Shaikh et al., 2019).

This trend is especially pronounced in KPK, where conservative values further restrict women's healthcare choices (Khan et al., 2021). The lack of female representation in these fields means many women either delay treatment or forego it entirely, exacerbating health disparities. This paper explores why female doctors gravitate toward gynecology and identifies strategies to encourage diversification into other specialties.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining:

Quantitative Survey: A structured questionnaire was distributed to 200 female medical students and doctors across KPK, assessing their specialization preferences and perceived barriers.

Qualitative Interviews: In-depth interviews with 15 female physicians in various specialties to explore career decision-making factors.

Hospital Data Analysis: Specialization distribution data from five major KPK hospitals was reviewed to assess gender representation.

Participants

Female medical students (n=120)

Practicing female doctors (n=80)

Hospital administrators (n=5)

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics for survey responses.

Thematic analysis for interview transcripts.

Results: following data was assessed through written proformas

Specialization Preferences

65% of female medical students preferred gynecology.

Only 12% considered surgery, 8% urology, and 5% orthopedics.

Barriers to Non-Gynecological Specialties

Societal Expectations: Many respondents reported family pressure to choose a "gender-appropriate" field.

Workplace Discrimination: Female surgeons and orthopedic specialists reported facing bias in male-dominated environments.

Lack of Role Models: Few female mentors exist in non-gynecological fields.

Physical Demands: Concerns about long hours and strenuous duties deterred women from surgery and orthopedics.

Hospital Data Findings

Gynecology departments had 80% female doctors.

Surgery and orthopedics had less than 10% female representation.

Discussion: The overwhelming preference for gynecology among female doctors in Pakistan, particularly in KPK, highlights deep-rooted societal and systemic influences. While cultural norms justify the need for more female doctors in all specialties, structural barriers—such as gender bias in surgical fields, lack of mentorship, and perceived physical demands—discourage women from pursuing non-traditional roles.

This imbalance has serious consequences: women in KPK often avoid seeking treatment for conditions requiring male specialists, leading to delayed diagnoses and poorer health outcomes.

The lack of female representation in surgery, orthopedics, and urology perpetuates gender disparities in healthcare access.

To address this, medical institutions must actively promote gender diversity through scholarships, mentorship initiatives, and workplace policies that support women in male-dominated fields. Without systemic change, the overconcentration of female doctors in gynecology will continue to limit healthcare equity in conservative regions.

Why Gynecology Dominates

Gynecology is perceived as a "socially acceptable" field for women, aligning with traditional gender roles (Ahmed et al., 2021). Additionally, mentorship opportunities are more readily available in this specialty.

The Need for Diversification, Given cultural restrictions in KPK, increasing female representation in all specialties is essential for equitable healthcare access. Women with

diabetes, blood disorders, or orthopedic issues often avoid treatment due to the absence of female specialists (Bukhari et al., 2022).

Strategies for Change, Scholarships & Incentives: Financial support for women pursuing non-traditional specialties.

Mentorship Programs: Connecting female medical students with role models in surgery, urology, etc.

Institutional Reforms: Hospitals should enforce anti-discrimination policies to support female surgeons and specialists.

Conclusion: While gynecology remains a critical field, the overrepresentation of female doctors in this specialty leaves other medical areas underserved, particularly in conservative regions like KPK. Systemic and societal barriers must be addressed to encourage diversification. Policymakers and medical institutions should implement targeted interventions to ensure women have equal opportunities in all specialties, improving healthcare access for female patients.

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