

Editorial

Gender equity in the field of medical physiology in Bangladesh

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Prerequisite and priority of medical physiologist workforce in developing countries like Bangladesh is progressively increasing both in public and private sectors.

First formal medical education including physiology started in 1948 with a few medical physiologist workforces in Dhaka medical college. Outstanding growth of public private medical institutes is now in a progression.

In Bangladesh, Physiology as a subject of basic medical science is exercised principally in the undergraduate studies, and the postgraduate sector of medical education of basic medical science faculty. There is very limited scope of research in Physiology, which is usually carried out in few medical institutes with post graduate curriculum, and in a medical university as a partial requirement for earning a postgraduate degree in medical physiology. The dynamic growth of medical colleges to pace the population growth in both government and non government sectors warrants the increased job opportunity for physiology educators. Obviously, it may be a causative factor to the accelerated growth of Physiologists. In addition, as this sector lacks clinical practice and less income generative, it may discourage the male medical graduates as a carrier of choice. The preponderance of females in this teaching based profession may be linked to the psychological motivation for females to choose physiology as carrier in Bangladesh.

Women's right for a repression free social life and their recognition in the society is now a global issue. Increasing employment of women in all sectors is crucial to resolve the gender issue for continuous development and welfare of a society.

Despite the very low profile of woman employment in Bangladesh, in south Asian perspective, some notable increase has been observed in the last decade. This is witnessed by the dramatic growth of women's participation in the health and community service.¹

The output of the analysis depicts some comparable situation in respect of feminine tendency in the fields of education, research and related activities especially in physiology teaching in Bangladesh.²

The issue of women involvement and evaluation of their contribution in Physiology was a topic of discussion in a gender equity symposium titled "women in physiology", held on 30th July 2009, in the 36th congress of International Union of Physiological Sciences in Kyoto, Japan. In this symposium, seven female physiologists and researchers from five countries presented their views and discussed the scenario of women physiologist in their respective countries from different viewpoints.³ They reached a consensus that women in physiology were under-represented in every sector than their male counterpart, in their countries, including US, UK, China, Japan, India⁴

In a chapter of history of American Physiological Society (APS), presented chronologically the data of the women's involvement in academic as well as in society activities in its history of first century mentioning involvement of a very few women in the activity of APS. There after the scenario has been changed dramatically⁵ The current survey showed that 19.9% APS members are female. Though, the data showed very slight but steady increment of women's participation from 1885 to 2001, but it was almost negligible in comparison to males.⁶ Increase in enrollment of women as faculty in the US medical school raised from 14% in 1989 to 40% 2000, was reported. Despite this, fewer women were tenured compared to their male cohort in US. It has been reported, women members occupying 14% in the Japan Physiological Society.⁴

The picture is quite unique in Bangladesh, the increment of percentage of women faculty from 62% in 2006 to 68% in 2012. Furthermore, the total increment during this time period leaning much towards the female. Considering the tenure track position, highest female frequency was observed in assistant professors with proportionately higher in all rank from professors and lecturers.

Gender equality in different professional sector including Physiology is currently a popular subject of discussion. A report of the US National Science Foundation in 2009 showed significant dropout of female physiologists after graduation. They also reported less representation of

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females in research leaderships and policy making positions in biomedical science and very slow progress in percentage of women appointment in different academic position.⁴

It is evident from the discussion of different physiological forum and numbers of published reports that, scanty number of female or least representation of female physiologists in university tenure track, as well as in research fields and industries, raised the issue of gender equality in UK⁴ Obviously, the question that may strike our mind what is the underlying reason of the high figure of women employment in Physiology in Bangladesh? This issue deserves some discussion.

Analysis concludes that in Bangladesh, there is ample opportunity for more employment and empowerment for females to build the working force in Physiology education and research. They can play vital role in the continued progress and advancement in medical physiology & other subjects and keep up the commitment of women for an unabated social development.

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