

Feminization of the Medical Profession : Bangladesh Perspective

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The emerging phenomenon of Feminization of the medical profession has thrown a new challenge before the health sector of Bangladesh. This phenomenon, often referred to as 'the feminization of medical profession,' is evident in both developed and developing countries. For instance, globally, 32% of medical graduates are now females.¹⁻² In countries like the USA, the percentage of female physicians has risen from 27% in 1983 to 48% in 2011, and similar trends have been observed in Canada, the Netherlands and various European nations. Even Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, China, Malaysia and Indonesia are witnessing a rise in the number of female physicians, with around 50% of registered physicians being female.³⁻⁴

Several factors contribute to this trend, including the humanistic appeal of medicine, socioeconomic factors, supportive family environments, early inspiration from family role models who are doctors, parental expectations, and financial prospects. For female aspiring doctors, additional motivations include the social prestige associated with the medical profession, cultural preferences for female doctors in conservative communities and intrinsic factors like a willingness to help underserved populations due to altruistic attitudes. However, female physicians often face challenges in choosing specific specialties, such as Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Paediatrics over Surgery, due to competing life priorities like marriage, childbearing, and family obligations, especially in patriarchal societies. They also encounter difficulties in relocating to rural job postings, primarily because of existing gender biases in unfamiliar, male-dominated environments.^{5,6}

This preference for certain specialties and limited mobility to rural areas can have implications for the healthcare system, leading to inadequate availability of Primary Health Care (PHC) services. Bangladesh is also experiencing a similar shift, with the proportion of female physicians steadily increasing. In 2022 of registered physicians in Bangladesh were female and this number continues to rise. In 2023 MBBS + BDS, Session 2022-2023, Total admission 1538. Male 659, Female 924 (Male 41.63% and Female 58.37% respectively under Chittagong Medical University.⁷ In early ninety female doctors were around 30%. This trend presents challenges for female physicians in advancing their careers, including selecting specialties that may not align with the healthcare system's needs and priorities.^{8,9}

Moreover, there is a decline in the number of female health workers, particularly physicians and nurses, in rural areas, which could worsen due to the ongoing influx of women into medical and allied professions. Another concern is attrition, with some female physicians not entering the profession after graduation, a phenomenon seen in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan.¹⁰⁻¹¹ Inadequate infrastructure and bad communications are two most important obstacles for female doctors to work at rural area.

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This increase in the number of female physicians is relatively recent in Bangladesh, and there is a lack of comprehensive, gender-disaggregated data on the subject. Such information is crucial for planning the future physician workforce to meet the healthcare system's needs and priorities, including specialization.

In conclusion, the growing trend of a predominantly feminization of medical profession presents a new challenge for Bangladesh's healthcare system. Policymakers and healthcare professionals should recognize this shift and devise effective strategies to create a supportive environment that attracts and

retains female physicians. Additionally, it's worth noting that this development may have a positive impact on Bangladesh's healthcare system. Furthermore, proactive efforts should be made to increase the number of female specialists in the pre- and para-clinical fields to meet the rising demands of the country's expanding medical, nursing and paramedic institutions. Unemployed female medical graduates are undoubtedly a national loss. So, all sorts of measures should be taken to reduce unemployment.

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