

Editorial

Navigating the Medical World: Challenges Faced by Women in Today's Society

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Introduction

In recent years, women have made remarkable strides in the field of medicine, becoming leaders, specialists, and educators in a traditionally male-dominated profession. A profession has no gender and every individual has a born right to pursue a profession of their choice. The world is progressing and the women in this world are also getting empowered with every passing day. However, despite these advancements, many women continue to face significant challenges after graduating from medical school. Their journey, especially in societies with strong patriarchal values, is often laden with obstacles that affect their professional growth, personal life, and work-life balance¹.

Gender Bias and Discrimination in Medical Professions

Upon graduating, many women enter a professional environment that still holds remnants of traditional gender roles, even within medical settings. Practical life challenges are way different from the student life challenges. Though merit-based advancements have gained traction, issues of gender bias remain pervasive. Studies reveal that a considerable number of female healthcare professionals report experiences of discrimination, ranging from fewer leadership opportunities to lower pay compared to their male counterparts². Gender biases and prejudices in the workplace create a glass ceiling that often hinders female physicians from reaching their full potential, causing frustration, burnout, and in some cases, a departure from the profession altogether³.

A 2020 study published in *The Lancet* reported that female doctors were 50% more likely to face discrimination and harassment than their male peers. This disparity has a ripple

effect, limiting the opportunities for many women in areas such as specialized practice, research roles, or positions in medical administration.

Societal Pressures and the "Career vs Family" Dilemma

Life as a student might be similar for both genders, if talking from an idealistic approach. Although the scenarios change for the genders as soon as they graduate. Men face the extreme pressure of supporting their families financially as well as economically, while women, in many parts of the world, are still made to believe that they need to make a tough choice between their family and career. This is particularly evident once they marry, as the cultural expectation to prioritize family over career remains strong. This balance becomes even more delicate in cultures with traditional views on gender roles, where the responsibilities of a working mother are often regarded as secondary to her duties at home.

Although this fact cannot be denied that women are the main pillar of transforming a house into a home, and have a natural tendency of multitasking but it seems unfair to disregard the individualistic personality of a human being completely once she starts a family. It is true that a child needs his/her mother the most in the early years of life but we need to remember that being a mother is a role of a woman, and not the whole world.

In many patriarchal societies, once a woman is married, her professional aspirations can be viewed as less important, leading to significant pressure to reduce work hours or even leave the workforce entirely. According to a 2021 report from the World Health Organization, approximately 40% of female doctors in certain regions either resign or switch to part-time roles after marriage, with societal expectations cited as the leading cause. The notion that women must bear the primary responsibility for household tasks continues to be a key factor in these high dropout rates.



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Striking a Balance: Work-Life Challenges

Balancing a demanding medical career with personal responsibilities is challenging for anyone, but for female healthcare professionals, this struggle can be amplified by cultural and social expectations. Many women report feeling overwhelmed by the need to fulfill dual roles — as dedicated doctors and committed caregivers at home. This "second shift" of responsibilities often leads to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and a deterioration in mental health, with women in medicine experiencing higher rates of anxiety and stress than their male counterparts.

A 2019 survey by the Association of American Medical Colleges found that 60% of female physicians reported feeling "very stressed" due to work-family conflicts, compared to 35% of male physicians³. These pressures affect their professional output and personal well-being, leading to a high turnover rate among female healthcare professionals, particularly those with young children.

The Impact of Family Expectations on Career Decisions

For many women, the decision to leave the workforce is not taken lightly. The majority of female doctors, however, face considerable external pressures from family and society to prioritize domestic roles over their professional aspirations. Statistics reveal that in some countries, nearly 70% of female healthcare graduates exit the workforce within five years of marriage due to family pressures⁴.

According to a study published in *BMC Women's Health*, among female doctors who left the profession post-marriage, 80% cited societal and family expectations as the primary factors⁵. The reality that many female physicians face is that even when they do return to their profession, they often face skepticism and scrutiny, affecting their confidence and career trajectories.

What Can Be Done?

To address these challenges, structural changes in both workplaces and societal norms are essential:

- **Flexible Work Policies:** Healthcare organizations should adopt policies that enable flexible hours, parental leave, and part-time options, allowing female healthcare professionals to balance work and family life⁶.

- **Supportive Mentorship Programs:** Initiatives for female mentorship and networking can help women find support, share experiences, and gain guidance on managing work-life balance in the context of traditional gender roles.

- **Education and Advocacy:** By educating both men and women on the benefits of gender equality and supporting dual-career households, societies can shift toward a more balanced view that empowers women to pursue their professional goals without sacrificing family responsibilities.

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The journey for women in medicine is literally written with challenges, yet the growing number of female doctors, researchers, and medical professionals is testament to their resilience and dedication⁷. Empowering women in the medical profession requires a collective effort, one that acknowledges and addresses the societal and structural barriers they face. Only by creating an inclusive environment and reshaping societal expectations can we ensure that women in medicine can thrive in both their professional and personal lives.

This journey of transformation is not just a professional pursuit; it's a movement toward equity that will benefit societies worldwide.

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