

Healing While Hurting: The Unspoken Burden of Female Medical Residents in Pakistan

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Gender stress, particularly among female healthcare professionals undergoing postgraduate training, is a pressing issue that warrants urgent attention in Pakistan's medical landscape. This pressure is particularly intense in areas like gynecology, pediatrics, cardiology, gastroenterology, and general medicine, where there's a high demand for female providers. The convergence of family stressors, marital status, parental responsibilities, financial constraints, grueling work hours, and a shortage of female healthcare workers exacerbates the problem, posing significant challenges to both individuals and the healthcare system at large.

The mental and emotional well-being of female postgraduate medical trainees hangs in the balance due to the immense stress they face. Pakistan is perceived to be a conservative society where the pursuit of medical careers is often hampered by unique challenges that take a significant toll. Overcoming several prejudices and pressures, and striking a balance between demanding professional lives and familial obligations can be overwhelming, leading to a concerning rise in stress and burnout. The dearth of female mentors and role models intensifies this issue, leaving many aspiring female healthcare professionals feeling isolated and inadequate.

The ramifications of gender stress in postgraduate medical training extend far beyond the individual, posing a significant threat to patient care and overall healthcare outcomes.

Studies reinforce that high stress levels in healthcare providers lead to an increased risk of medical errors jeopardizing patient safety and hence compromising the quality of care delivered. In many parts of the world including Pakistan gender discrimination happens to be the main cause of declines in work efficiency. It has also been confirmed that women in healthcare are impacted in terms of their professional confidence, and experience more stress and intimidation than males, something that is reflected in their clinical performance. Moreover, the paucity of women in crucial specialties fosters existing gender disparities within the healthcare system. This limits access to culturally competent and gender-sensitive services for female patients in a country like Pakistan, creating a critical service gap.

Confronting the pervasive issue of female gender stress in postgraduate medical training necessitates a multi-pronged approach that tackles both individual and systemic challenges. Medical institutions must prioritize the well-being of their trainees by implementing robust support systems tailored to address the unique pressures faced by female doctors. This could entail fostering mentorship programs, ensuring accessible counseling services, and promoting work-life balance through flexible scheduling options, on-site childcare facilities, and comprehensive parental leave policies.

Furthermore, bolstering the representation of women in healthcare leadership is pivotal to cultivating a nurturing environment. Career advancement and personal fulfillment can be achieved in an atmosphere where females are empowered to take leadership positions within academic and professional spheres on the grounds of gender equity.

It's time to move beyond applause by celebrating 3rd February as International Women's Physicians

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Day and 8th March as International Women's Day. We are expected to invest in programs that support and empower female doctors in training and practice. The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly advocates for women's empowerment, recognizing it as critical for achieving global health goals. The policymakers can weave a bright future by prioritizing investments in healthcare infrastructure and workforce development to address the shortage of female healthcare professionals in critical specialties. From expanding scholarship programs to financial incentives and continuing education opportunities for enhancing competencies, we can offer more to encourage women to pursue careers in medicine. The absence of support groups in Pakistan should be urgently addressed so that trainees may cope better with potentially harmful workplace stressors.

To dismantle the systemic barriers hindering female healthcare professionals, broader societal efforts promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are essential. Cultivating a culture that champions respect, equality, and support across all sectors is crucial to fostering an inclusive healthcare system. By doing so, we have to create an environment where female trainees and professionals can flourish and contribute meaningfully to the healthcare system.

In essence, for safeguarding the health and well-being of our communities we need to tackle female gender stress in postgraduate medical training; it's a strategic imperative more than a moral obligation. Prioritizing the needs of female healthcare professionals and implementing targeted interventions at both individual and systemic levels is paramount. This will foster a more equitable and sustainable healthcare system that benefits all. For the collective well-being of society, we have to work collaboratively and pave the way for a future where gender ceases to be a

barrier to professional fulfillment for healthcare providers, allowing each individual to contribute meaningfully.

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