

Gender Influence on Priorities and Mental Health Throughout the Medical Journey

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Study Question and Background

This study aims to evaluate the impact of various factors, including gender and personal values, on the mental health and priorities of medical students and residents throughout the medical journey. There is very little literature examining the changes in priorities and mental health of those pursuing a career in medicine, especially in regard to the impact of gender. Our research questions include:

- How are mental health priorities set and how do they differ across genders?
- How does mental health change for women throughout medical school and residency?
- How do priorities change for women throughout medical school and residency?

Study Population

Our participants included male and female medical students (MS1-MS4), residents, and fellows at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine. This included the Amarillo, Lubbock, and Permian Basin campuses.

Data Collection Methods

This project used the TTUHSC School of Medicine P3-1 Honors Project Omnibus Survey, an online survey instrument sent to all TTUHSC School of Medicine medical students as well as selected medical residents/fellows, graduate students, pharmacy students and School of Medicine faculty. The survey, which included 19 question sets that branched according to respondent groups, received a total of 410 responses from the TTUHSC community. The questions that our group submitted received 265 responses. This project was approved for exempt review by the TTUHSC Institutional Review Board.

Survey questionnaire involved Likert scale-type items regarding:

- Personal values and priorities
- Mental health

Results

- Women had higher rates of perceived gender impact on their career compared to men across all years.
- Both men and women found certain factors more important when choosing a specialty as shown in Chart 2. Contrary to our hypothesis, both sexes rated the importance of these factors equally.
- Men reported experiencing stable but higher rates of depression overall, whereas women had rates that increased throughout medical school and residency.
- Women who had 4-6 hrs. of sleep experienced increased thoughts of self-harm compared to men.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that priorities regarding a career in medicine do not change throughout the medical journey and do not differ between the two sexes. Despite this, women feel their gender has a greater impact on opportunities and success in their career compared to men, although this decreases throughout their training.

Depression is a serious problem throughout medical school for medical students, however, in residency it is markedly increased for women. This may be due to lack of sleep which seems to relate to increased thoughts of self-harm in women.

Next Steps

- Provide MS1-MS4 students information regarding mental health resources, such as the Student Wellness Center, which can reduce rates of depression
- Educate prospective medical students about mental health and the importance of sleep.
- Share the results with all medical students to debunk commonly believed stereotypes about gender and specialty choice.

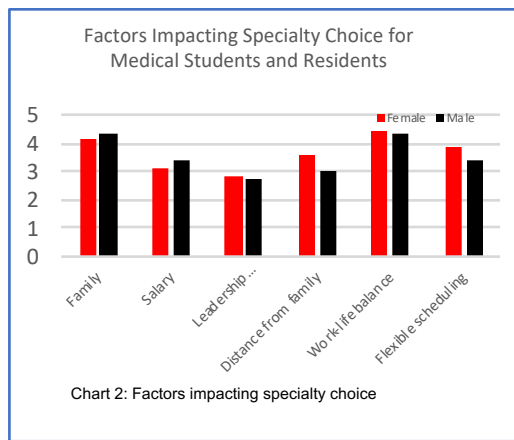
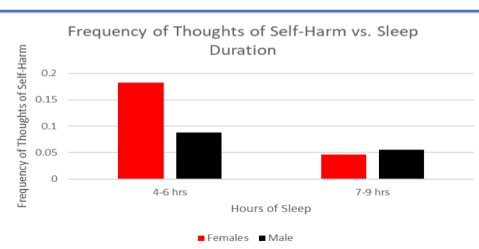
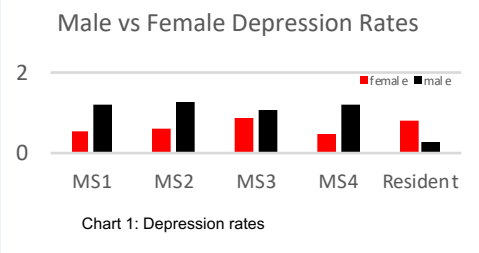


Chart 3: Impact of Sleep on thoughts of Self-Harm

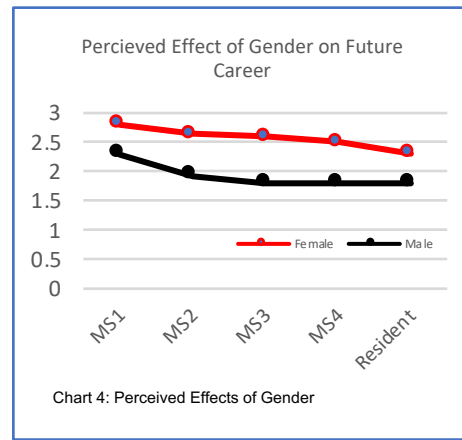


Chart 4: Perceived Effects of Gender