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Gender-based differences in career plans of House Officers and Residential House Officers at Teaching Hospital, Jaffna

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Background and objective: Gender is a significant factor that influences the career plans of medical professionals. Various factors including work-family conflict, societal perceptions and discrimination based on gender are known to impact career choices. This research aims to describe gender differences in career plans, perceptions on the influence of the personal and professional environment on career plans and associated factors among House Officers (HO) and Residential House Officers (RHO) at Teaching Hospital Jaffna.

Methods: A hospital-based descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at Teaching Hospital Jaffna. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from August 9, 2024 to September 30, 2024 from all HOs and RHOs. The questionnaire was issued to the study participants and collected next day. The data was analyzed using SPSS 26. Standard descriptive statistics and the Fisher's exact test were used in the analysis (significance level 0.05).

Results: A total of 76 doctors participated with a response rate of 92.1%; 06 participants were removed from the analysis owing to missing data. Among the remainder, 60 (85.7%) were HOs and 10 (14.2%) were RHOs; 33 (47.1%) were males and 37 (52.9%) were females. In the sample, 75.8% (n=25) of males and 64.9% (n=24) of females planned to specialize ($p = 0.321$). A higher proportion of males (76%) showed interest in surgery-related specialties compared to females (41.7%); more females (58.3%) than males (29.2%) showed preference for non-surgical specialties. Female preference (29.2%) was slightly higher for obstetrics and gynaecology compared to males (24%). Males were more likely than females to perceive availability of time to spend with family ($p=0.014$), working hours ($p<0.001$), on call schedules ($p=0.011$) as having influenced their career plans.

Conclusion: The study highlights substantial gender-based differences in career choices among early-career doctors. Consistent with the literature, more males showed preference for surgery-related fields, while females went for non-surgical specialties. In contrast, more female doctors showed interest in obstetrics and gynaecology than reported in the Sri Lankan literature. Gender-specific factors need to be considered in medical education and workforce planning. Providing adequate support systems could help bridge gender gaps in certain specialties.

Keywords: gender, career plans, house officers, residential house officers