

Gender-based job satisfaction in emergency department: an audit at Colombo South Teaching Hospital, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Emergency department (ED) job satisfaction is a critical determinant of ED healthcare workers' well-being, staff retention, especially in the excessively overcrowded low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where both "job satisfaction" and "gender-based issues" are less discussed. This comprehensive audit was initiated at the Accident and Emergency Department (A&E) of Colombo South Teaching Hospital (CSTH), Sri Lanka, to identify specific domains of "gender disparity in job satisfaction," an evidence-based, targeted departmental intervention for quality improvement.

Methods

A single-center, cross-sectional audit was conducted in early 2025 within CSTH A&E (average 400-500 patients per day). This audit included the permanent ED HCW, including physicians and nursing officers.

Data collected via an anonymous, voluntary, self-administered online/ printed questionnaire specified to LMIC ED context issues. Domains assessed included overall job satisfaction, gender bias, environment and work-life balance, burnout and compensation, workplace equity, unconscious bias, threats, expectations, and support available.

Results

A robust response of 82% was achieved (92 participants: 79.2% female HCW); 98% agreed on duty equity, but lower equity in female leadership (75%) and performance skills (84.8%). Unconscious bias of patients and colleagues was the majority agreement. Gender-based EM field leadership bias (64.2%) and favoritism (76%) were highlighted. However, no significant (<1%) physical abuse or harassment was reported, and some (32.5%) have been exposed to gender-based verbal discrimination. The yearning for care in pregnancy (75%) and lactation (55.5%) was noted; 45.6% of female HCWs are concerned about gender-based threats from the patients/bystanders.

A crucial gender-based disparity was highlighted, 95.7% stated the need to develop standard welfare systems within the ED, whereas the overall job satisfaction scores were not statistically significant.

Conclusion

This comprehensive audit critically identifies specific disparities, even though no significant overall gender difference in job satisfaction, with a significantly lower job satisfaction of females in work-life balance and promotions. This audit emphasized gender-specific challenges of organized support systems. Recommendations include gender-based unconscious bias awareness, flexible scheduling options for special categories, and an equitable and supportive environment.

Keywords: Gender-based job satisfaction, gender equity.