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GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN MEDICAL STUDIES IN PALESTINE: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF CLINICAL STUDENTS AND INTERNS.

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Abstract:

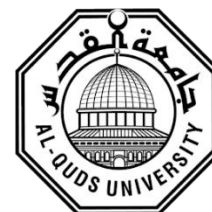
Background: For many, studying medicine is a childhood dream; the idea of being a respected doctor is a cherished escapade. But what many don't realize is that compromises should be made along the road, a road that might seem idyllic from afar. Gender discrepancies are one of the least-discussed struggles for any gender, and they can lead to sacrifices along the way. These discrepancies could influence academic performance, clinical exposure, mental health, and specialty preferences; however, evidence remains inconsistent across our cultural settings. In Palestine, a conservative society, social norms may uniquely shape the clinical training experiences and opportunities among medical students. Our study aims to evaluate gender-based differences in academic, clinical, psychological, and career-related outcomes among Palestinian clinical-year medical students and interns.

Methods: A multicenter cross-sectional observational study was conducted among 400 clinical-year medical students and interns from the five major Palestinian universities in the West Bank. Participants completed a structured questionnaire assessing their demographics, academic performance, clinical exposure, specialty preferences, and mental health using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). Statistical analyses were carried out with 'R statistical software' using chi-square tests, Mann–Whitney U tests, Kruskal–Wallis tests, and multivariate regression modeling.

Results: The mean age of participants was 22.7 ± 1.5 years, with females making up 58.3% of the population, and 41.8% were male. The prevalence of depression, anxiety, and significant stress was 29.8%, 35.5%, and 10.8%, respectively, with no significant gender differences observed in mental health outcomes. Male students demonstrated significantly higher GPAs than female students (82.0 ± 4.47 vs. 80.57 ± 4.96 , $p=0.002$) and reported superior written examination performance ($p<0.001$). Although male students reported higher OSCE confidence ($p=0.010$), female students reported significantly better OSCE performance ($p=0.009$) and more time spent in clinical placements ($p<0.001$). Female students were more likely to perceive clinical training opportunities as gender-fair ($p=0.038$). As for specialty preference analysis, it revealed that males were significantly more likely to pursue surgical specialties ($p=0.002$), whereas females favored pediatrics ($p=0.037$), obstetrics and gynecology ($p<0.001$), ophthalmology



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($p=0.006$), and dermatology ($p<0.001$). Income, prestige, and intellectual challenge were more frequently prioritized by male students when selecting specialties.

Conclusion: Gender-based differences do exist in Palestinian medical education across academic achievement, clinical exposure, and specialty preferences, while the mental health burden remains similarly significant across both genders. Male students demonstrated stronger theoretical academic performance, whereas female students showed advantages in practical clinical assessment and opportunities. These findings suggest that social, cultural, and curricular factors may differentially shape educational experiences by gender and emphasize the necessity of targeted interventions to promote fair clinical training and mentorship opportunities within Palestinian medical education.

Key Words: Gender-Based Differences, Medical students, Academic Performance, Mental health, Clinical exposure, Specialty choice, Palestine