

Original Article

PREFERENCE OF A PARTICULAR GENDER OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDER; ATTITUDE OF PATIENTS OF TERTIARY HEALTH CARE FACILITIES OF RAWALPINDI

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Objective: To measure the preference of patients of tertiary health care towards gender for selection of doctor.

Methods: Patients of both genders visiting outpatient department of Medicine and Surgery were included in the study. Questionnaire included demographic details of patient and statements related to choice of gender of doctor. Results were analyzed using SPSS version 22.

Results: Out of 264 patients 135(51.1%) were male and 129 (48.9%) were females. Most of patients (69.7%) were not given choice of selection of doctors. Of those who were given choice 47.3% opted for female doctors and 39.8% opted for male doctors while 12.9% had no choice.

Conclusions: Patients had almost equal preference for both genders. Female doctors are slightly preferred over male doctors. Feeling of comfort, caring attitude, intelligence and competence were main reasons observed for gender preferences.

Keywords: gender; preference; doctors; patient preference.

Introduction

Good relationship between doctors and patients is very important in health care system. Gender difference is considered potential barrier in this relationship.¹ It is very important to know the preference of patients for gender of treating physician.² Male and female physicians have different styles in providing health care facility, with female physician having more caring attitude.³ while in some studies women physicians are considered to be comparatively less competent and experienced than male physicians.^{1,3,4} There are many socio-cultural determinants that govern the attitude of patients toward selection of doctors on basis of gender. These become even more significant in developing countries like in Pakistan where socio-cultural boundaries are strict.^{5,6} Only few studies were found about the patient's preference towards gender of their treating physician. It is very important in our country to know the patient's choice of their doctor.

Methods

This descriptive cross sectional study was conducted at Holy Family Hospital, Rawalpindi. Duration of study was 3 months (from February, 2017 to April, 2017). After approval from Institutional Research Forum Rawalpindi Medical University, Sample size was calculated by WHO calculator. A total of 264 patients visiting Out Patient department of Medicine and Surgery, Holy

Family Hospital were interviewed, to assess their perspective and attitude regarding preference of particular gender for selection of health care provider for consultation, examination and reasons for preferences. We used a self designed questionnaire for this study. Data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 22 using simple descriptive statistics.

Results

A total of 264 patients were included in the study. The mean age of participants was 37.9 ± 14.36 years. The gender distribution was almost equal for both genders. Most of them (79.5%) were married. Also 60.2% were from urban population. All the demographic details are given in **table 1**.

Table-1: Demographic details of participants.

Variable	n (%)	
Age	37.9±14.36 years	
Gender	Male	135 (51.1%)
	Female	129 (48.9%)
Department	Medicine	124 (47%)
	Surgery	140 (53%)
Marital Status	Married	212 (80.3%)
	Single	47 (17.8%)
	Divorced	1 (0.4%)
	Widow	4 (1.5%)

Educational Status	Uneducated	49 (18.6%)
	Primary	59 (22.3%)
	Secondary	87 (33%)
	Heigher Secondary	36 (13.6%)
	Bachelors	22 (8.3%)
	Masters	9 (3.4%)
Heigher Education		2 (0.8%)
Occupation	Unemployed	42 (15.9%)
	House Wife	99 (37.5%)
	Employed	123 (46.5%)
Resident	Urban	159 (60.2%)
	Village	105 (39.8%)
Religion	Islam	261 (98.9%)
	Christianity	3 (1.1%)

Table-2: Factors leading to choice of a doctor.

Factor	n (%)
Age	61 (23.2%)
Appearance	34 (12.9%)
Gender	103 (39.2%)
Behaviour	207 (78.7%)
Competence	82 (69.2%)
Availability	54 (20.5%)
Attention	147 (55.9%)

Table-2: Demographic details of participants.

Variable	Male	Female	No of Choice	p-value
Gender	Male	26	18	0.000
	Female	14	99	
Department	Medicine	64	21	0.019
	Surgery	66	61	
Marital Status	Married	104	29	0.091
	Single	26	05	
	Divorced	0	1	
	Widow	0	4	
Educational Status	Uneducated	31	5	

Patients were asked whether they had a choice to choose their doctor or not? Most of the patients (69.7%) told that they were not having a choice and 30.3% had a choice. They were asked that on which basis, they choose their doctor? Most frequent cause (78.7%) was the behaviour of the doctor. All the causes are given in **table 2**.

Most of the patients (47.3%) in this study opted for female doctor, followed by those opting for male doctor (39.8%) and those having no choice (12.9%). It was found that most of the patients opted for similar gender of physician. A significant number of patients in surgery opted for male doctors. Age of the patients, educational status, marital status, religion and place of residence had nothing to do with a particular gender choice of physicians. All data are given in table 3. When asked that why they want to be treated by a particular gender of physician, the most frequent answer (65.3%) was that they feel comfortable with it. All the reasons are given in **Fig-1**.

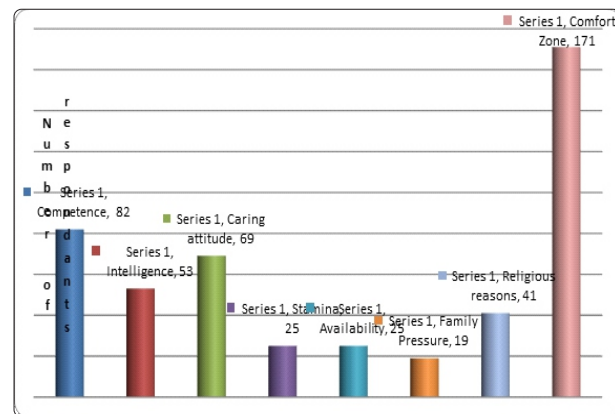


Fig-1: Factors leading to choice of a particular gender of doctor.

	Primary	21	25	13	
	Secondary	37	42	8	
	Heigher Secondary	17	16	3	0.153
	Bachelors	11	8	3	
	Masters	4	3	2	
	Heigher Education	2	0	0	
Resident	Village	44	48	13	0.847
	City	61	77	21	
Age Categories	< 18yreas	7	11	1	
	19-40 years	53	76	16	0.325
	41-60 yreas	38	32	15	
	>60 yreas	7	6	2	
No. of visits in last year	=5 vusuts	66	86	22	
	>5 visits	39	39	12	0.631

Discussion

This study is done to determine the preference of patients of tertiary health care for selection of doctors on the basis of gender. Most of the patients were not given choice for selection of their doctors. Most of the patients selected doctors of their own gender as they feel more comfortable with them but overall preference for female doctors was slightly high because of their caring attitude. Behavior of the doctor was considered the most important factor in the selection of doctors.

On this topic data is deficient in Pakistan but few studies have been done. According to a study done in surgical department, majority of patients had no preference for gender of operating surgeon but with slight male preference. The consideration of surgeon gender was based upon procedure performed.⁷

Based on international studies, different results have been noted. Different patients make different choices in different situations.² According to a study in which attitude towards female physicians was determined, preference was towards male doctors because female doctors were considered less competent and less experienced.¹ In another study female patients were less satisfied with female doctors while male patients were satisfied with female doctors reason being unknown.⁵

Patients were more satisfied with female doctors in providing preventive health services.^{8,9} Female doctors have different communication style than male doctors as they provide detail information to their patients and have caring attitude.^{10,12} In our study patients had almost equal preference for both genders but female doctors are slightly preferred over male doctors because of their empathizing behavior.

The limitation of current study was that it was quantitative while ideally it should be qualitative. Other similar studies should be carried out on same topic involving more centers.

Conclusion

Patients had almost equal preference for doctors of both genders. Female doctors are slightly preferred over male doctors. Feeling of comfort, caring attitude, intelligence and competence were main reasons observed for gender.

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