



Gender Bias in Healthcare: The Hidden Barrier to Equal Care

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DESCRIPTION

Gender bias in healthcare refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender, often leading to disparities in the quality of care received. Despite advances in medical science and a growing understanding of human rights, gender bias remains a significant challenge, affecting both women and men in different ways. The consequences of gender bias in healthcare are far-reaching, leading to misdiagnoses, delayed treatments, and poor health outcomes. Addressing gender bias is essential to ensuring equitable and effective healthcare for all individuals, regardless of gender. Gender bias can manifest in various ways in the healthcare system, affecting how patients are treated by medical professionals, the type of care they receive, and the accuracy of their diagnoses. For women, one of the most prevalent forms of gender bias is the dismissal or minimization of their pain and symptoms. Studies have shown that women are more likely than men to have their symptoms attributed to emotional or psychological factors, even when they present with physical health conditions. For example, women experiencing heart attacks may be misdiagnosed with anxiety or stress, delaying necessary treatment and increasing the risk of severe health complications. Additionally, research has demonstrated that women are less likely to receive aggressive treatment for certain conditions, particularly when they involve chronic pain or reproductive health issues. Endometriosis, a condition affecting one in ten women, is often underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed due to its symptoms being overlooked or dismissed as normal menstrual pain. This delay in diagnosis and treatment can lead to long-term pain, infertility, and other complications. Men also experience gender bias in healthcare, though it often manifests in different ways. For example, men are less likely to seek medical help due to societal norms around masculinity, which

often equate seeking care with weakness. This can lead to men delaying treatment for conditions like prostate cancer or heart disease, which are more prevalent in men. Furthermore, when men do seek medical attention, they may be less likely to receive mental health care. The stigma surrounding men's mental health can prevent them from accessing necessary services, leading to untreated conditions like depression, anxiety, and a higher risk of suicide. In addition to individual biases, healthcare systems themselves can perpetuate gender inequities. Medical research has historically focused more on male patients and their conditions, leaving women's health issues underexplored. For example, many clinical trials have primarily involved male participants, leading to a lack of knowledge about how certain medications or treatments affect women. This gender gap in research has resulted in the underrepresentation of women's health needs in medical education, policy, and practice. The healthcare workforce itself is also impacted by gender bias. Women, who make up a large portion of healthcare professionals, are often subject to lower pay and fewer leadership opportunities compared to their male counterparts. This gender inequality in healthcare professions not only affects women's career progression but also contributes to the overall biases in care. In situations where leadership positions are predominantly held by men, gendered perspectives and priorities may dominate healthcare decisions, further disadvantaging female patients. The consequences of gender bias in healthcare are profound. Gender bias can lead to misdiagnoses, delayed treatments, and unnecessary suffering. It can also contribute to health disparities, with women, men, and non-binary individuals all facing different barriers to equitable care.

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