

Abstract

Title: Assessing Sex Differences in Anesthesia Practice

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Introduction: The sex gap between physicians and nurses has been well-documented. Although more women are being represented in medicine, the world of nursing is still female-driven. However, when it comes to nurse anesthesia, men embody almost half of the population. Even as a whole, the anesthesia profession consists of more males than females. This lack of diversity jeopardizes progress, quality, and innovation. Exploring the experiences of these anesthesia professionals is necessary to understand why the gap exists. This project aimed to identify and describe factors that contribute to the sex gap in anesthesia practice through qualitative interviews.

Methods: This qualitative study assessed the way biological sex (male/female) functions in anesthesia practice, as well as perceived treatment differences. Anesthesiologists and nurse anesthetists, who were at least 18 years old, licensed in the United States, and who have practiced for at least a year were invited to participate. One-on-one, audio-recorded interviews were conducted over the phone or in-person to explore the experiences of anesthesia professionals.

Results: Seven of the ten contacted anesthesia professionals responded and participated in this study. Four participants were nurse anesthetists and three were anesthesiologists. Participants were primarily female (57%) and Caucasian (57%) with an average age range of 41-50. Content analysis revealed that participants identified work-life balance and a desire for family-life as prime factors contributing to the sex gap. Also, several respondents recognized a discrepancy in the way patients and fellow professionals respond to them based on sex. There were also regional divergences noted.

Conclusion: Biological sex influences individuals in their choice to become a nurse anesthetist or anesthesiologist. This was related to certain factors such as work-life balance, regional aspects, and personal experiences. In addition, female anesthesiologists and nurse anesthetists garnered a lower level of respect from colleagues and patients. Representation and respect are essential to a pioneering and effective workplace.