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Differences in U.S. Medical School Faculty Job Satisfaction by Gender

Increased demands on academic medical faculty have raised awareness about faculty satisfaction and vitality, in part because of the demonstrated empirical link between job satisfaction and retention. Evidence suggests that faculty are affected by their perceptions of what is valued and rewarded in their work environments, and that supportive environments can foster faculty satisfaction. Given the high costs of faculty turnover,¹ it is imperative to understand the factors that contribute to the retention of faculty. A previous *Analysis in Brief* (AIB) examined key areas of U.S. medical faculty job satisfaction and the disconnect for some faculty between what they value in the workplace and actual workplace opportunities.² In this AIB, the effects of gender are examined to obtain a more nuanced understanding of job satisfaction.

Methodology

In spring 2007, the Association of American Medical Colleges—in partnership with the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE)—administered a faculty satisfaction survey to full-time faculty at 10 medical schools.³ The survey included questions about institutional climate and culture, promotion policies, faculty recruitment and retention, and global satisfaction, among others. The data for this report come from the 3,208 of 9,148 (35%) faculty who responded to the survey. Of the total responders,

1,222 (38%) were women and 1,986 (62%) were men.⁴ Several of the significant differences by gender found through chi-square analyses are presented here.

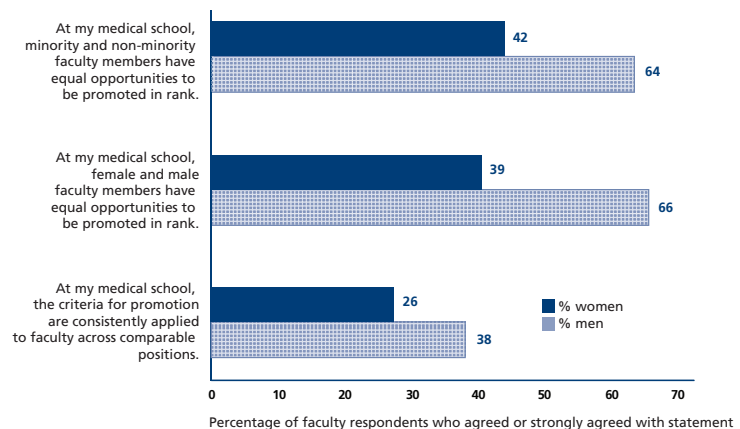
Results and Discussion

Climate, Culture, and Collegiality
Research shows that the workplace climate and organizational culture at academic medical institutions are central to faculty satisfaction.¹ Overall, 65 percent of all respondents noted that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their “fit” (i.e., their sense of belonging) in their respective departments, though these percentages differed by gender (68% of men respondents and 60% of women respondents reported being satisfied, $p < .001$). Yet, just 36 percent of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the workplace culture at

their medical school cultivates a supportive climate for balancing home and work responsibilities. These percentages also differed by gender (39% of the men vs. 33% of the women, $p < .001$). The men responding to the survey more often agreed or strongly agreed that the workplace culture at their institution cultivates collegiality than did the women (60% vs. 55%, $p < .01$).

These results, which confirm previous research showing that faculty perceptions of institutional culture differ by gender,¹ underscore the importance of persistence in creating work environments that foster development and satisfaction equitably as progress toward gender parity continues. They also suggest, however, that dissatisfaction across all faculty exists with specific aspects of workplace climate.

Figure 1: U.S. Medical School Faculty Agreement with Statements about Aspects of Promotion, by Gender

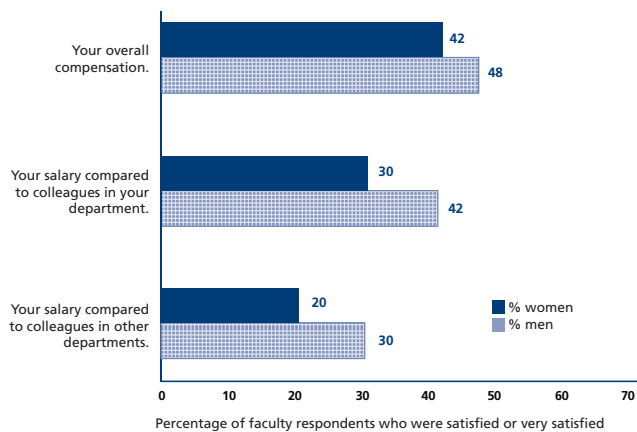


¹ See www.aamc.org/data/aib for references.

² Buntun, SA. U.S. Medical School Faculty Job Satisfaction. *Analysis in Brief*, 8 (5), Washington DC: Association of American Medical Colleges, 2008.

³ See www.aamc.org/data/aib for a list participating institutions and additional methodology.

⁴ The overall response rate included 555/1,498 (37%) of the basic science faculty and 2,653/7,650 (35%) of the clinical faculty. Future analysis will focus on differences in satisfaction by faculty type.

Figure 2: U.S. Medical School Faculty Satisfaction with Aspects of Pay and Compensation, by Gender

Opportunities for Promotion

Results show significant differences between men and women in satisfaction with opportunities for promotion of faculty. As Figure 1 illustrates, the percentages of women agreeing with the statements that “minority and non-minority faculty members have equal opportunities to be promoted in rank,” that “women and men faculty members have equal opportunities to be promoted in rank,” and that “the criteria for promotion are consistently applied to faculty across comparable positions” are much lower than are the percentages of men. In all cases, the differences are significant ($p < .001$). On average, about one-fifth of respondents answered “I don’t know” to each item.⁵ These findings are also consistent with literature showing that women have less favorable perceptions of equitable treatment of women and faculty of color than their men colleagues.¹

Pay and Compensation

Finally, results indicate that gender differences also exist in satisfaction with various aspects of pay and compensation. While many faculty respondents noted broad levels of dissatisfaction, women respondents were significantly less satisfied with

their overall compensation, with their salary compared to colleagues with similar qualifications in their departments, and with their salary compared to colleagues with similar qualifications in other departments than were men respondents (Figure 2). For the latter two items about salary comparisons, about one-fifth of the faculty responded “I don’t know.”⁵ Research suggests that higher salaries, in and of themselves, are not linked to higher satisfaction; rather, a sense of equity of compensation can often lead to increased satisfaction.¹ In this regard, equity studies at institutions, followed by discussions of results and alignment of resources, may lead to some improved satisfaction with these issues.

Conclusion

Medical school administrators and leaders can use these data highlighting gender differences in job satisfaction to improve the work environments of their faculty. For example, department chairs may want to promote transparency in applying institutional policies so that faculty understand by what criteria decisions are made. They may also need to take steps to ensure the equitable treatment of men and women faculty in areas of resource

distribution. In addition, these results suggest that deans may want to improve support for their women faculty to promote greater satisfaction with the overall institutional culture and climate. The overall dissatisfaction in some areas of faculty promotion, pay, and compensation, and the significant differences in levels of job satisfaction between men and women warrant continued work in both institutional policy and practice to create equitable environments that maximize the satisfaction and vitality of all faculty.

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⁵ Chi-square statistics found at: www.aamc.org/data/aib