Reviewer's report

Title: Gender and the professional career of primary care physicians

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Reviewer: Vladimir Sibalic

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Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Minor Essential Revisions:
One or two of the most interesting gender characteristics that the authors wanted to look for should be mentioned both in the abstract and in the introduction/background paragraph of the manuscript in order to motivate the reader to go through this inspiring article.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes. The authors used a self-administered questionnaire for physicians’ self-assessment. They described the subject-matter.

Discretionary Revisions:
The questions used were not presented.

Are the data sound?
Yes. It should be noted that the statistical power was calculated after exclusion of non-respondents.

Minor Essential Revisions:
- In the result-paragraph the authors state, that the adjusted Odds Ratio (OR) was significant in 10 of 24 professional activities. Unfortunately it is difficult to find out which activities were meant.
- Non-significant p-values (0.06 - 0.1) should not be outlined.
- In table 1, the column for non-respondents can be omitted in order to make it more legible.
- In table 3, the 95% confidence interval for the OR for Health center managers was written as (1.83 – 2.03). Because the OR is 4.69, the upper limit of the 95% confidence cannot be lower than the OR itself. The digit 2.03 is most likely wrong.
Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes

Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Study limitations were mentioned by the authors. The internal validity of this study is not disputed, although external validity should be estimated, because it is more meaningful. The most important results were discussed extensively and related to the literature. Because of the abundance of cited references the discussion-paragraph stands out like a review article. Nevertheless, some newer publications were not considered.

Minor Essential Revisions:
Some aspects were debated, although they were not evaluated in the study, like interest of female physicians in their career or psychological barriers or the “class-ceiling” concept. In contrast, the sex role theory and family concerns of male and female physicians were not discussed. Since the intention of the authors was to write a descriptive and not an explanatory paper, the conclusion is risky. The second sentence “This situation of disadvantage…” can be left out and could be replaced by…”There is strong indication that female physicians are disadvantaged in Andalusia because…”

Are the limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes

Do the authors acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes

Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title is short, clear, descriptive and without idealistic formulation. The title suggests a comprehensive and concluding data collection, which is disproportionate.

Minor Essential Revisions:
-It should be mentioned in the title, that general physicians in Andalusia were investigated.

Major Compulsory Revisions
-The authors point out that 50.8% physicians were female with a high level of significance. Because the mean age of male physicians was 51.3 years, the difference is 2.2 years. The relevancy of this result should be explained.

-In the abstract, the hours of housework of female physicians are outlined. In table 2, the calculated coefficient of variation for hours of housework for female physicians from Monday to Friday is 1.1% (Mean 2.9, Standard Deviation 3.09). This indicates that some women do a lot of housework, whereas others don’t.
The same was shown for male physicians. A more differentiated description of this finding is mandatory.

-Table 2 shows, that 6.08% of female physicians lived alone with children and 9.9% without. The proportion of male physicians who lived alone was significantly different. But the vast majority of physicians of either sex lived in a partnership. Although this gender difference is an important finding, the data should be interpreted with more caution.

-Other important results from table 3 were not mentioned in the abstract, such as scientific engagement and PhD status.

Is the writing acceptable?
Yes

advice on publication

The manuscript is worth reporting. But it is not prudential and credible that all five authors contributed equally to the manuscript.

Comments to authors:

Ana Delgado and coauthors determined and compared in their manuscript the professional activities of female and male primary care physicians in Andalusia by analyzing their self-estimated declaration of activities in questionnaires. Furthermore, they assessed the effect of diverse health centers on the gender specific performance of several professional activities in Andalusia. Gender studies on a profession focus between men and women have been published already:

Nowadays, the majority of the young people interested in becoming a doctor are women. It is therefore mandatory to analyze the differences of the relationship to work of male and female physicians (Deriaz S, Rev Med Suisse, 2010 Jul 28;6 (257):1438.

The dominant role of the state in Spanish society affected the structure of the audit profession. The audit profession did not have an independent strategy about the role of women at work (Nieves Carrera et al. 2001 European Accounting Association).

Studies of gender have identified a number of social factors that restrict the access and promotion of women into the profession (Kirkham and Loft, 1993; Anderson et al. 1994).

Many women have adapted to the predominant male model of success, making conscious choices either not to have children, to defer having them, or to organize their domestic life so as to be able to dedicate themselves to their careers. Part time work has been shown to be associated not only with less training but also with lower pay and downward occupational mobility. So the interesting question for investigation is the transformation of these general observations to the physicians’ career in general practice. Recent studies suggest that lifestyle choices rather than merely career advancements influence both female and male surgeons’ career plans .Two major mechanisms have
been referred to as the reason for gender differences in career paths for physicians: Socialization or sex-role theory and structural barriers. Male students were less influenced by family concerns (Riska E. Maturitas, 2010 Oct 26).

Lifestyle choices have to be taken into account, when physician’s career advancements are analyzed. Women were more likely to report never getting enough sleep, never waking refreshed and excessive sleepiness and were less likely to live with children up to 12 years old. But men and women had a common desire for better work/life balance and for part-time work (Gander P. et al, Acad Med, 2010, Sep;85(9): 1526-36).

Factors affecting the day-to-day work of general practice may determine the carrier choice of medical students: poor working and general conditions leading to an increasing dissatisfaction among GPs in Germany. Decreasing prestige of GPs caused by changed personal and occupational values and attitudes within the society as well as poor representation and image of general practice as a discipline within the medical curriculum (Natanzon I, Dtsch Med Wochenschr. 2010 May;135(20): 1011-5. Epub 2010 May 11).

Efforts to encourage more young physicians to enter academic careers should focus on providing research experience during preclinical training and providing long-term support for research which enables physician scientists to maintain their interest and involvement in clinical medicine (Ledley FD, Pediatrics. 1993, Sep;92(3):436-41).

Declaration of competing interests
I declare that I have no competing interests.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests.