

Saudi female paramedics' perceptions of challenges in the workplace: A qualitative study

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Background

- Paramedics are often the first point of contact in the majority of cases in out-of-hospital settings.
- In most countries, males and females have equal opportunities to train and apply for paramedic roles.
- Saudi Arabia, where longstanding cultural attitudes and systemic practices have limited access for females to certain professions such as paramedicine.
- Since 2010 providing equal access to females has resulted in the number of qualified female paramedics employed increasing from 20 in 2010 to > 1,500 in 2018.

Objectives

To explore working female paramedics' perceptions of challenges in their workplace.

Methods

- Qualitative descriptive methods using four focus groups with 15 Saudi female paramedics from four major hospitals in Riyadh region.
- Focus groups used a semi-structured interview method was employed using open-ended questions.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyse the study data.
- Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) 21 elements of the standards used as a qualitative guideline.

**Currently the national
Emergency Medical
Service provider in
Saudi Arabia does not
employ female
paramedics in the field.**



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References

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Results

- Three main themes emerged from the focus groups that reflected the challenges faced by Saudi female paramedics:
 - i) Personal factors:
 - Home responsibilities
 - Personal hardships
 - Pregnancy or giving childbirth
 - ii) Social factors:
 - Saudi society prefers that females work in closed locations such as hospitals
 - Conservative culture
 - iii) Employment factors:
 - Limited jobs
 - Discrimination
 - Gender bias
 - Physical fitness
 - Long shift hours
 - Balance their home responsibilities and work duties
 - Violence

Conclusion

- Overall, the four focus groups found that participants faced several challenges affecting their family responsibilities, work duties and capacity to work in the field of paramedicine in Saudi.
- Saudi female paramedics who entered the field were negatively impacted by the challenge of trying to balance family planning and job responsibilities
- Saudi female paramedics were also constrained by Saudi culture and traditions limiting their participation in the paramedicine workforce.
- Future research is needed to address these challenges and develop various strategies to lead to the establishment of a rich and diverse paramedic workforce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.