

Differences in Practice Characteristics Between Male and Female Chiropractors in Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: A total of 75% of the chiropractic medicine students in the new program at the University of Zürich are women, which is in stark contrast to the traditional ratio of chiropractors in Switzerland, where 75% have been men. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare work behaviors between female and male chiropractors relating to workload, patient variety, and chiropractic treatment techniques.

Methods: This is a secondary analysis of data from the Swiss Job Analysis 2009 study. The design was an online survey to all practicing chiropractors in Switzerland that had a 70% response rate of 183 returned surveys. Differences between male and female chiropractors in the various categorical responses involving practice workload, characteristics and patient types were compared using the χ^2 test.

Results: Male chiropractors had significantly more years in practice ($P = .0001$), worked more hours per week ($P = .0001$), and saw more patients ($P = .0001$) and more new patients ($P = .004$) per week compared with female chiropractors. Female chiropractors spent significantly more time with patients during follow-up visits ($P = .017$). There were no significant differences in treatment techniques used or the types of patients seen between the sexes.

Conclusion: Because female chiropractors work fewer hours and see fewer patients per week, this may lead to a shortage of chiropractors in the future as the sex ratio within the profession slowly changes in Switzerland. (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2017;xx:1-7)

Key Indexing Terms: *Career Choice; Chiropractic; Practice Patterns, Physicians'*

INTRODUCTION

Because of the start of a new chiropractic program in the faculty of medicine at the University of Zürich in 2008, a job analysis survey of chiropractic practice in Switzerland was performed in 2009.¹ The goal of that study was to identify specific characteristics of Swiss chiropractic practice to ensure a comprehensive education of future chiropractors in Switzerland. Additionally, the authors wanted to compare and contrast differences between chiropractic practice in Switzerland and other countries. Now, as the first 3 cohorts of students have finished their studies at the University of Zürich, and with the majority of students currently studying chiropractic medicine at the University of Zürich being women, it is time to

look ahead and use the 2009 collected data again for additional information to inform the profession on potential changes to practice as a result of changes to the chiropractic demographics. Overall, 75% of the chiropractic medicine students are women and 25% men.² This is the exact opposite proportion of the percent sex distribution identified for practicing chiropractors in Switzerland in the 2009 job analysis.^{1,3} This is reported in detail in Figure 1. Although the size of the chiropractor student cohorts at the University of Zürich are small (20 students per year maximum intake) and with the Swiss government increasing restrictions on foreign graduates practicing in the country, over time the proportion of women chiropractors in Switzerland will significantly increase as the older practitioners retire. This change makes it important to analyze the specific differences between the 2 sexes in terms of the way they practice.

The increasing proportion of female students is a trend identified in the whole medical faculty of University of Zürich and other Swiss and non-Swiss universities.⁴⁻⁶ The inquiry of potential students for medicine at the University of Zürich in 2013 (these are the latest available data) identified an increasing number of women. Female candidates at the bachelor level reached 58% in 2013 compared with 57% in 2012. At the master's level the percentage rose from 53% in 2012 to 54% in 2013. Of the 2013 graduated students, 62% were women. It is

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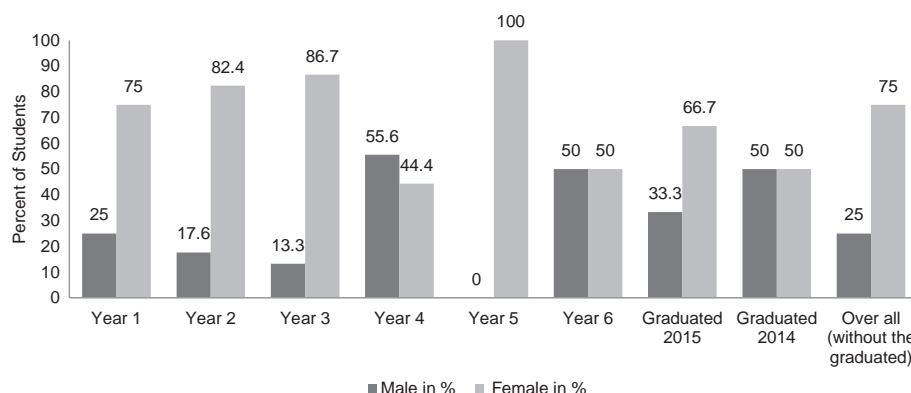


Fig 1. Proportion (%) of male and female students in chiropractic medicine at the University of Zürich in 2015.

also interesting to note the increasing female proportion of “habilitations” (ie, research leading to assistant professorship; 16% in 2012, 30% in 2013), university lecturers (25% in 2012, 27% in 2013) and professors (10% in 2012, 12% in 2013). If this is looked at in a wider time frame, the percentage of female graduated students increased clearly from 48% in 2004 to 62% in 2013.⁷ However, the proportion of female academics is definitively lower, usually because of the challenge of balancing career with family obligations.

It is well known that women are more likely to work part time compared with men.⁸⁻¹⁰ This helps to explain why women experience being female as a career obstacle.¹¹ Female physicians seem to be less career oriented but more parenthood oriented, with family and private lifestyles being more important for them compared with their male counterparts.⁹ So it is not surprising that men have higher academic scores than women, and thus in the academic and hospital medical hierarchy the higher positions are still mainly held by men.^{8-10,12} Studies about the impact of gender on specialty choices of Swiss medical residents reported the following tendencies. Although male residents tended to select technical and surgical specialties or other fields with high prestige and income such as cardiology, female medical residents more often chose gynecology and obstetrics, pediatrics, psychiatry, or anesthesiology. Those fields tend to have less prestige and lower income.^{9,13,14} The strongest impact on a particular specialty choice was gender.¹³ Factors such as free time and having children and the ability to combine a career with having a family plays an important role for women in their decision on choosing a medical specialty.^{11,15} This often has a negative impact on a career progression.¹¹ These same trends are also occurring in other countries, with women physicians more likely to work part time and participate in group practices.^{8-10,16-19}

Because there is an obvious majority of female students currently studying chiropractic medicine at the University of Zürich, similar to their medical counterparts, it is important to

know what effect, if any, this will have for patients and their chiropractic care in the future. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify differences in the practice characteristics and treatment techniques of female and male chiropractors and to discuss what impact these differences might have for the profession in the coming years.

METHODS

The Cantonal ethics committee determined that ethics permission was exempt for this study (EK-10/2009). Swiss chiropractors were informed of the study by e-mail instructions and told that participation implied informed consent.

For this study a secondary analysis of data from the online survey conducted for the Swiss job analysis 2009 study was used.¹ These data were collected using a questionnaire based on the United States National Board of Chiropractic Examiners job analysis survey and the United Kingdom General Chiropractic Council job analysis survey with some Swiss chiropractic specific questions added.¹ This final questionnaire was available in English only and was tested for face and content validity before being used.¹ The questionnaire of the Swiss job analysis was sent to all of the 260 members of the Swiss Association of Chiropractors and the data were collected between July and the end of September 2009. With 183 submitted surveys, a 70% response rate was obtained.¹ All of the returned data were made anonymous by an independent online survey expert (www.surveymonkey.com) who also made sure the participants received their 5 continuing education (CE) credits for completing the survey.

For this study only the categorical data comparing male and female chiropractors regarding number of years in practice, hours worked per week, CE hours obtained per year, number of patients seen per week, number of new patients seen per week, time allocated for a follow-up visit,

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