



ORIGINAL ARTICLE / *Health policy and practice*

## Women's career choices in radiology in France

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### KEYWORDS

Women physicians;  
Gender issues;  
Medical residency;  
Fellowship;  
Career choice

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to determine the possible effects of gender on residents' and fellows' motivations in choosing radiology as a career in France, and on choosing a practice setting later on.

**Material and methods:** An online survey was sent to French residents and fellows in order to access their radiology practice and career aspirations, as well as the potential influence of their gender. Influence of being a woman on initial professional expectations, professional choices, and the evolution of career paths was investigated using the chi-square test.

**Results:** Responses were collected from 206 French residents and fellows. The reasons for choosing radiology residency were, at first, mostly the same for men and women such as interest in the specialty (100% of women and men), work conditions (74% of women and men), technical aspects of the specialty (63% of men and 52% of women,  $P=0.11$ ) or "reasonable" workload (29% women and 21% men,  $P=0.19$ ); however, 74% of women stated that maternity might influence their career choices, and were less interested in unstable positions exclusively in private practice (45% men and 33% women,  $P=0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Male and female radiologists primarily considered the same factors in choosing their specialties. However, maternity is still a source of inequality in France, including fewer opportunities for fellowship positions or academic careers. Furthermore, more women were willing to work in salaried positions to acquire a secure job, even though compensation might be lower.

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The steady increase in the number of women in medical professions has been observed worldwide over the past 50 years. In 2015, 43.5% of the 222,000 doctors practicing in France were women [1], and that percentage is still increasing [2]. Similarly, the percentage of women in radiology there is increasing, but not as rapidly. Indeed, among the 8300 practicing radiologists in France (3.7% of the total number of active physicians), only 31% were women, and even fewer women (27%) worked in private practice settings [1]. However, the percentage of women in radiology residencies is growing at a much higher rate, representing 50% of current radiology residents [2]. This “feminization” of the medical profession is forecasted to continue, given France’s increasing number of female medical students.

Currently, women represent 63% of medical students [2], and one estimate suggests that by 2022, women will outnumber men in medicine, representing 57% of the country’s doctors [3]. More women are attracted to medical school in most European countries as well, bringing the percentage of female medical students graduating from medical school in Europe to approximately 60% [4].

The impact of these trends raises many questions. Indeed, since the percentage of women in medicine is increasing, the potential difference in their career choices and career paths might have a strong impact on the medical profession [5]. Given significant differences among specialties and even subspecialties, specific investigation of each specialty is important [6]. Up to today, there has been no comparative study of how gender may influence careers in radiology.

The purpose of this study was to determine the possible effects of gender on residents and fellows’ motivations in choosing radiology as a career in France, and on choosing a practice setting later on.

## Materials and methods

The survey was conducted online and involved participation requests from the *Union des internes et jeunes radiologues* (UNIR; i.e., French Association of Residents in Radiology) office to the UNIR members, using a verified mailing list containing 280 addresses of young radiologists. The survey was designed and submitted as a Google® forms web link, allowing respondents to fill in their responses on any Internet browser.

The survey submitted to French residents and fellows contained 26 questions as well as blank sections for open comments (Table 1). The first 15 questions (14 multiple-choice questions and 1 open-ended question) were answered by both men and women respondents, anonymously. Another 11 questions (10 multiple-choice questions and 1 open-ended question), were answered by women respondents only.

The data were processed using Excel® 2010 for the global and sub-groups analysis. The statistical analysis of the survey responses was performed using JMP8 (SAS) software, using the chi-square test. For the quantitative data, the two-sided *t*-test was used. A *P* value of  $\leq 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

## Results

### Demographic distribution

Two hundred and six French trainees (residents and fellows) completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 74%. Of the respondents, 103 were women and 103 were men, with a mean age of  $27.5 \pm 2.5$  (SD) years (range: 24–36 years) for men and  $27.5 \pm 2.4$  (SD) years (range: 24–33 years) for women. Among the respondents, 73% of the women and 64% of the men ( $P=0.17$ ) were living with a partner, and 15% had children. Out of the 206 respondents, 83.7% were residents and 16.3% were fellows.

### Initial considerations for choosing radiology as career in France

The reasons for choosing a radiology residency were initially the same for men and women: interest in the specialty (100% of women and men;  $P>0.99$ ), work conditions (74% of women and men;  $P>0.99$ ), technical aspects of the specialty (63% of men vs. 52% of women;  $P=0.11$ ) or “reasonable” workload (29% women vs. 21% men;  $P=0.19$ ). However, men and women had no significant difference in their responses to salary considerations (76% of men vs. 69% of women;  $P=0.26$ ). In addition, the limited contact with patients in radiology was not mentioned as a strong reason for the specialty choice (20% of men vs. 27% of women;  $P=0.24$ ). The single significant difference was that women were more attracted by the multidisciplinary aspect of radiology (91% of women vs. 76% of men;  $P=0.004$ ).

### Career’s choices and their underlying factors

In general, men and women initially expressed similar considerations concerning their career choices within radiology: interest in the job (99% of women vs. 96% of men;  $P=0.17$ ), salary (91% of men vs. 84% of women;  $P=0.13$ ), stability (76% of women and 73% of men;  $P=0.62$ ), proximity to the workplace (72% women vs. 62% men;  $P=0.13$ ), recognition (64% of women and of men), independence (63% of women and 73% of men;  $P=0.12$ ), and, less importantly, authority (34% of women vs. 36% of men;  $P=0.76$ ). However, the most important considerations for women were the working hours (95% of women vs. 84% of men;  $P=0.01$ ) and the holiday length (86% v women vs. 72% of men;  $P=0.01$ ), a minimum of 5 weeks of paid vacations per year [7].

As for practice type, most men (63%) and women (68%) wanted a combination of public and private practice ( $P=0.45$ ) (Fig. 1), while more men (24%) than women (10%) sought an academic career ( $P=0.008$ ). Also, more men were interested in working exclusively in private practice (45% of men and 33% of women,  $P=0.05$ ), while women were more willing to become salaried employees either in private practice (Fig. 1) (20% of women and 11% of men;  $P=0.05$ ) or in public hospitals (18% of women and 8% of men;  $P=0.03$ ).

Regarding working days, men planned to work slightly more days than women ( $4.5 \pm 0.6$  [SD] and  $4 \pm 0.6$  [SD] days a week, respectively;  $P<0.001$ ). There was a significant difference concerning salary: Men hoped to earn from € 10,000 to 20,000 a month, while women were targeting € 5000 to 10,000. Fifty percent of the men and 48% of the

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