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WOMEN IN HEALTH SECTOR

Background

Despite increased efforts at global, regional, and country level to promote gender equality, women continue to be underappreciated and underrepresented in leadership positions across a range of sectors. In the health sector specifically, women comprise a substantial proportion of the health workforce. According to the World Health Organization's Global Health Observatory data repository, 2021, on sex distribution of health workers, women make up about 67% of employment in the health and social sector, compared with 41% of employment across all sectors. Within the health sector in Kenya, women comprise over 75% of the workforce, making them indispensable as contributors to the delivery of health care services.

Human resource classification by gender in the Government and FBOs/NGOs health facilities

According to Ministry of Health source, the government has 24 different cadres which include medical and non-medical personnel. The table below shows human resources classification by gender. Most cadres are dominated by men as shown in the table below. There are 110 male dentists against 103 females, 307 male pharmacists against (203) females. The majority of specialist medical practitioners are male (332) as compared to (87) female. However, there are more female nurses and midwives, (15,428) compared to male (4,943).

Classification	Males	Females	Total
Clerical support workers	697	878	1575
Community health workers	34	14	48
Dental assistants and therapists	68	24	92
Dentists	110	103	213
Dieticians and nutritionists	46	181	227

Elementary occupations	1065	1158	2223
Environmental and occupational health and hygiene professionals	19	3	22
Environmental and occupational health inspectors and associates	1637	645	2282
Generalist medical practitioners	613	479	1092
Health management personnel	35	22	57
Health service managers	1491	551	2042
Life science professionals	29	12	41
Medical and dental prosthetic technicians	54	24	78
Medical and pathology laboratory technicians	1254	721	1975
Medical imaging and therapeutic equipment operators	203	83	286
Medical records and health information technicians	310	224	534
Non-health professionals not classified	145	53	198
Non-health technicians and associate professionals not classified	355	92	447
Nursing and midwifery professionals	4943	15428	20371
Occupational Therapist	199	79	278
Other health service providers – interns	560	480	1040
Clinical Officer	1935	1273	3208
Pharmaceutical technicians and assistants	265	130	395
Pharmacists	307	203	510
Physiotherapists	319	156	475
Physiotherapy technicians and assistants	84	173	257
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	845	143	988
Specialist medical practitioners	332	87	419

Support Service and sales workers	83	102	185
Trades workers	13	10	23
Total	18,050	23,531	41,581

From the table above, it is evident that women are concentrated in the lower status health occupations and their representation declines with respect to higher professional categories including managerial and decision-making positions in the public and private sectors. The underrepresentation of women in managerial and decision-making positions has evidently led to less attention to and poorer understanding of both the particular features of working conditions that characterize much of women’s employment, and the health care needs specific to women.

This reveals that the gender gap in global and local health is not reflective of the practices and goals within the sector. Without the full and equal participation of all relevant stakeholders striving to achieve the local and global priorities, Kenya is denying herself a valuable resource in reaching ambitious goals.

Conclusion

While the detrimental health impact of a gender imbalanced health leadership remains largely unknown, the benefits of equal gender leadership are many. This therefore calls for gender-responsive leadership at all levels of the health system, as well as concerted efforts to eliminate gender bias and discrimination in order to support full participation of all genders and assure equitable access to opportunities.