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Inicio Home

Indice del  
volumen Volume  
indexComité Editorial  
Editorial BoardComité Científico  
Scientific  
CommitteeNormas para los  
autoresInstruction to  
AuthorsDerechos de autor  
Copyright

Contacto/Contact:



### Letters to the Editor / Cartas al Editor

## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON FEMININE MEDICAL MATRICULATION IN ARGENTINA.

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To the Editor:

In agreement with the Statistical Bulletin of the Rosario National University, medical career, perceived as a "masculine" one<sup>1</sup>, experienced during the 90's a remarkable increase in the feminine matriculation (from 50% to 60%). This increase reached 70% at the end of 2008 and still endures. Mostly, this matches up with what happened in many Latin American and European countries<sup>2-5</sup>.

Following Reichenbach and Brown's proposal<sup>6</sup> about the need of more evidence related with gender and academic medicine and basing upon former personal communications<sup>7-9</sup>, we carried out a triennial quantitative and qualitative analysis, ethically framed, in two medical schools (one, belonging to our University and the other, to the Litoral National University) (2005-2008). It intended to begin the investigation of the possible reasons underlying in this increasing phenomenon. Basically, we applied a toll to 22% and 15% of the total admitted masculine and feminine students (n= 510). Complementarily, 25 women and 25 men, selected from a population of 200 tolled students, were interviewed. This selection obeyed to specific guidelines for a more rich, valid and reliable registration<sup>10-12</sup>.

Quantitative data evidenced a similar percentage of women and men (85% ± 5%) in relation with the first time that most participants thought of becoming a physician (15 years) and when they made a firm decision on it (17 years). This revealed a quite short deliberative period. In this decision, women disclosed not only a significantly higher influence received from parents, close friends and mass media when compared with men (p<0.01) but a higher attraction for Biology as the main reason for choosing Medicine (p<0.01).

In contrast with men, women did not give any relevance either to the social status of Medicine or to its potential condition of independent profession. Approximately, 94% of women and men perceived Medicine as their only self-satisfying career in professional life and consequently referred no previous university studies.

Qualitatively, women looked like believing themselves able to cope with all kind of challenges demanding Medicine, feeling themselves equal to, and still more capable than men of facing difficult endeavors and succeeding in such attempt. Likewise, they expected medical career as allowing a quick and well-matched working option and felt that Medicine kept being attractive by offering a wide range of specialties, gave proper access to different functions and provided personal autonomy, which rendered them independent from different life circumstances. Beyond the image women-mother, socially and culturally constructed in all the interviewed women, they seemed to visualize Medicine as allowing their simultaneous development as women, mothers and physicians. Furthermore, they envisaged the man-tailored Medicine as a challenge for reverting such status.

This preliminary report points out that beyond the non critic simplification supported by those convinced that men are searching more rentable ecologic niches considering medical "proletarization", worth deepening psychological, sociological and cultural reasons also exist<sup>13</sup>.

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