The wage gap in American society has been a political discussion topic for many years. The podiatric profession has a substantially larger wage gap among podiatric physicians earn on average approximately 65% of a male podiatric physician’s salary1. On a bell curve, women’s salaries have been shown to fall within the lowest 25% for the profession.2

Previously cited reasons for pursuing a podiatric foot and ankle fellowship include job opportunity, marketability, academic progression, prestige, confidence, and intellectual curiosity1. Additionally, literature has suggested a financial benefit may exist for pursuing an advanced reconstructive podiatric foot and ankle fellowship3. However, the study consisted largely of male respondents and did not differentiate between genders.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to assess if an additional year of fellowship training closes the wage gap between male and female Doctors of Podiatric Medicine (DPMs) in the United States.

Materials and Procedure

Under Institutional Review Board exemption, all female fellowship graduates from a single ACFAS recognized podiatric foot and ankle fellowship with a publicly listed email address were invited to participate in the present study (n=31). An anonymous 5 question online survey was developed specifically for the study’s purpose and was available for a total of 14 days.

The mean age of the female graduate fellows was between 35 and 44 (range 25 to 44) years. Most respondents have been in practice less than 5 years (12/17, 71%). The practice settings are as follows: 6 (35.4%) hospital/university, 3 (17.6%) orthopedic group, 3 (17.6%) multispecialty group, 3 (17.6%) podiatry group and 2 (11.8%) solo practice.

The following assumptions were used to calculate the NPV:
1. No time was taken off between residency, fellowship, and employment
2. No debt payments were made during residency or fellowship, and the interest capitalized at the current fixed federal rate of 6.8%.
3. An amount of $300,000.00 for educational indebtedness
4. A student loan repayment period of 20 years, respectively. The mean annual comparative income difference for female graduate fellows in relation to podiatric foot and ankle surgeons without fellowship training was as follows: clinical (~$26,082.00) and general (~$1,015.00).

Of the thirty-one participants with a publicly listed email, seventeen responses were obtained (17/31, response rate of 54.8%) between June 3rd, 2019 and June 17th, 2019. The findings of the present study may be interpreted to suggest that additional fellowship training does not close the gender wage gap. However, critical readers are encouraged to interpret the data with consideration to the study’s inherent limitations. Currently it is unclear whether additional fellowship level training closes the wage gap. Further investigation is warranted.

Discussion

However, critical readers are encouraged to interpret the data with consideration to the study’s inherent limitations. Several biases exist in this study, including the selection bias of only ACFAS fellowships, assumptions made when calculating NVP, and a small sample size of predominately young physicians. Therefore, it is unclear whether additional fellowship level training closes the wage gap. Even with the inherent limitations, this study still highlights the wage gap present in this profession and calls for further research on the topic to determine source(s) and ultimately resolution.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study may be interpreted to suggest that additional fellowship training does not close the gender wage gap. However, critical readers are encouraged to interpret the data with consideration to the study’s inherent limitations. Currently it is unclear whether additional fellowship level training closes the wage gap. Further investigation is warranted.

References