Abstract

Beyond the Sirens: The Impact of Gender on Women's Experience of Being a Paramedic in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract for a thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Professional Practice

This study explores the impact of gender on women's experiences as paramedics in the near gender-balanced workforce of Aotearoa New Zealand. Whilst the existing knowledge base highlights predominantly negative experiences shaped by sex and gender—like those faced by women in other historically male-dominated professions—the topic remains under-researched, with no studies specific to Aotearoa identified.

This research aimed to raise awareness of the impact that cisgender female physiology has on the experience of being a paramedic. It looked to deepen understanding of how work-life integration, career progression, and workplace interactions affect women's experience of working as paramedics. Data was collected from 148 respondents through an anonymous online survey, combining quantitative responses from Likert-style questions with qualitative insights using reflexive thematic analysis. Applying concepts of Appreciative Inquiry, a novel approach in this field, the study identified opportunities and possibilities for improving women's experiences.

The findings reveal the profound influence of female-sex physiology, work-life integration, career progression, and workplace interactions on women's experiences of being a paramedic. These experiences are captured in the themes: blood, sweat, and tears: cisgender women on the frontline; finding equilibrium: balancing the highs and lows; the career progression paradox: equity in theory, barriers in practice; and negative interactions: positive feedback loop. Notable contributions include insights specific to Aotearoa and the impact of menstruation on cisgender women paramedics. While challenges are evident, positive experiences highlight opportunities for meaningful change.

The study offers evidence-based recommendations for gender-informed, inclusive policies and procedures to support women's physiology. Following these suggestions can improve workplace interactions and build a safe, equitable, and productive environment. These recommendations underscore the potential for paramedicine to lead by example, setting a benchmark for other industries. The outcomes of this study move towards driving systemic change and contributing to societal progress.

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