



**The Interplay between Work and Caring Responsibilities in Female Health Professionals**

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The retention of female health professionals in the workforce has been predominantly lower than that of their male colleagues. This situation is likely to worsen because with an ageing population, the caring responsibilities will extend beyond childcare to include caring for ageing family members. Women of this so called “sandwiched generation” may face greater challenges in continuing and developing their careers.

To meet the increasing chronic disease burden of Singapore’s ageing population, more health professionals are needed. This growth can be achieved by increasing the number of trained health professionals and rolling out initiatives to promote their retention in the workforce. Our research investigates the opportunities and challenges that female health professionals in Singapore face while balancing their careers and caring responsibilities, and how these responsibilities influence their decisions to remain in, return to, or exit the workforce. The study will be conducted in three phases: reviewing existing knowledge, talking to female

health professionals in Singapore, and conducting a nationwide survey.

Our literature review of recent publications explored the factors that influence female health professionals to remain in, return to, or exit the workforce in Asia-Pacific countries. Findings from 74 relevant articles suggest that multiple factors influence individuals’ decision to practice. Personal characteristic factors include age, marital status, health, personality and psychological traits, and level of commitment towards family, among others. Key decision-making factors are work relationships and organisational structure and culture, which include policies, opportunities for professional development, a sense of calling towards their profession, and a sense of fairness and security. Altogether, these factors contribute to the development of job satisfaction, a sense of commitment, job stress, and burnout. Based on these factors, healthcare

professionals evaluate remaining in, returning to, or exiting the workforce. Unfortunately, none of these studies originated from Singapore, making our work essential to develop a deeper understanding in the local context.

Phase Two of the study will involve interviews and focus group discussions with doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to broaden our understanding of the impact that important others and work arrangements have on career choices. In the final phase, we will conduct a representative survey to quantify the prevalence of the challenges faced. This will enable us to prioritise initiatives that could optimise contributions by female health professionals in the workforce while also maintaining their caring responsibilities.

If you would like to contribute your views of the opportunities and challenges faced by female doctors, we invite you to participate in our study. To be eligible, you need to be a female doctor (Singaporean/Permanent Resident) who has been registered with the Singapore Medical Council for at least three years. If you are interested to participate or wish to know more about this study, please contact Clarissa Toh at [clarissa.tohws@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:clarissa.tohws@ntu.edu.sg) or 6592 2481. ♦

(L to R) Clarissa, Prof Smith (principal investigator) and Li Zi are part of the Family Medicine & Primary Care team at Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine. They are working to understand female health professionals’ decision to remain in, return to, or exit the professional workforce.

