



DENTAL PRACTICE

Bullying, discrimination push male hygienists to leave field

Male dental hygienists experience gender discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment in the workplace, according to a study published on February 8 in the *International Journal of Dental Hygiene*. These experiences may push male hygienists to leave the profession.

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Male dental hygienists experience gender discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment in the workplace, according to a study published on February 8 in the *International Journal of Dental Hygiene*. These experiences may push male hygienists to leave the profession.

Employers and professional dental and dental hygiene organizations must address gender discrimination and other inappropriate behaviors to keep the profession inclusive, the authors wrote.

"Although the number of men entering the dental hygiene profession has increased, the issues male hygienists face could potentially lead to men leaving, which can negatively impact the dental hygiene profession and continue to further segregate the profession based on sex," wrote the group, led by Jeannette Diaz from the Forsyth School of Dental Hygiene at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.

In 2020, 6.1% of dental hygienists were men, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Some evidence suggests that men who work in professions historically are dominated by women, like nursing, experience stereotyping and discrimination, although there is little research about men's experiences working in dental hygiene.

To explore the experiences of men in dental hygiene, the researchers used social media and snowball sampling to find male dental hygienists interested in completing a survey. They analyzed the survey responses from 233 male dental hygienists. Approximately 86% of participants were from the U.S., and the rest were from other countries, including the U.K., Canada, and Malta.

Roughly half (57%) of respondents said that patients have refused treatment by them due to their gender. Meanwhile, about 20% of respondents reported sexual harassment by patients, with approximately 10% reporting that the inappropriate behavior was perpetuated by employers and coworkers.

Additionally, men in dental hygiene face workplace bullying from employers, colleagues, and patients; 15%-20% of hygienists experienced bullying at work, the authors noted.

These behaviors may push some male hygienists to leave their jobs. Approximately 27% of men who experienced gender discrimination from their

employers planned to leave the profession in the next year, compared with 12% of those who didn't face such discrimination.

Gender discrimination from patients and colleagues may also affect a male hygienist's desire to leave the field. About 57% of men who experienced gender discrimination from colleagues reported a desire to look for employment in another field, compared with 36% who didn't experience such discrimination. Moreover, hygienists who experienced gender discrimination from patients were more likely to want to leave the profession (49% versus 33%), the authors wrote.

The study did have several limitations, including the fact that the survey was based on self-reported responses, which can introduce bias. Nevertheless, dentistry must improve awareness about the inclusion of male hygienists in the workforce and develop strategies and policies that combat sexual harassment, stereotypes, lack of support, and discrimination, Diaz and colleagues wrote.

"Understanding men's experiences in dental hygiene may provide an opportunity to encourage men, those with other gender identities, and underrepresented minorities to enter the dental hygiene profession to further diversify and promote a more inclusive workforce to better serve our communities," they concluded.

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