

# Full report

*Group 20 - James Ng, Jennifer Tang, Qimin Zhang, Ziqi Zhou*

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## Abstract

There are many factors that contribute to the salary of physicians in medical colleges. In this study, a linear model with mean salaries of 1994 and 1995 as response and gender as main factor is fit to a lawsuit dataset to determine whether Houston College of Medicine has engaged in a pattern and practice of discrimination against women in giving promotions and setting salaries. Department, primary emphasis, certification, publication rate and experience were determined to be confounders, while rank was found to be an interaction. Gender demonstrates no association with salary from 1994 and 1995 after adjusting for department affiliation, clinical emphasis, board certification status, rank, and experience, which means the data does not support the claim of gender discrimination in setting salaries at Houston College of Medicine.

## Introduction

Women being paid less than men is nothing new. In fact, this has been the norm ever since women started entering the workforce. In order to address such inequality, the Equal Pay Act and the Civil Rights Act were both signed into law in 1963 and 1964, respectively, with the purpose of prohibiting wage disparity based on sex and discrimination against employees based on sex, race, national origin, color and religion (Crampton et al, 1997). Despite the efforts to eliminate gender based wage gap, almost half a century later, a woman working full-time still only earns an average of 81.2 cents for every dollar a man working full-time earns in the U.S as of 2018 (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

This issue is not only prevalent in the US, but also happens to transcend to other countries spanning within and between various occupations as well. One particular field of interest is in academic medicine. In the age of modern medicine, the diversity of medical practitioners has progressed substantially with more than one-third of physicians being women in a historically male dominated field, however compensation inequality still remains to be an issue that seeks improvement (Butkus, 2018). It was reported in a study conducted in 2016, that female physicians makes 90 cents for every dollar that a male physician makes in academic medicine (Freund et al, 2016). In addition to the wage disparity between male and female physicians, the lack of advancement in a female physician's career, despite the growing number of women entering the medical field, remains significant (Butkus, 2018). Many factors have been considered to contribute to such disparities such as speciality choice, hours worked, years of experience, and publication counts.

These differences in wage and lack of promotions for female physicians can only be perceived as unfair and will eventually lead to a lawsuit. A few years ago, all the female physicians at Houston College of Medicine filed a lawsuit against the college for violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by engaging in consistent patterns and practice of discrimination against women faculty members in giving promotions and setting salaries. To address this situation, this paper explores the data set that the female faculty members presented of the different faculty positions held and salaries earned by the male and female physicians at Houston College of Medicine. Additional factors such as department affiliation, gender, board certification status, clinical or research emphasis, publication rate, and years of experience as a practicing physician, were also provided and examined. The goal is to find the associations that could support the claim of gender discrimination in the salary determination at this university hospital.

## Methods

The dataset contains 7 factors that are potentially associated with the salaries of the Houston College of Medicine faculty. These are department, gender, primary emphasis (clinical or research), certification (board certified or not certified), publication rate (publications on CV/ years between CV date and MD date), years since obtaining MD and rank (supplemental table 1). The mean salary for the 1994 academic year and the salary for the 1995 academic year (salary after increment to the 1994 income) are the outcomes. Histograms were made to visualize the distribution of the outcomes. The histograms show right skewness so log transformations of the outcomes were carried out (supplemental figure 1). Since gender was the main variable of interest, models were analyzed in R studio (RStudio Team, 2015) to test for associations between gender and salary.

A simple linear regression model was developed using mean salaries for the 2 years provided and gender. Using this model as the reference point, other variables in the dataset were analyzed as potential confounders or interactions. Model selection was made using criterion-based procedures. Once the final model was determined (supplemental table 2), residuals vs fitted values plot, quantile-quantile plot, scale-location plot and residuals vs leverage plots were used to diagnose the model (supplemental figure 2) and anova was used to determine significance (Supplemental table 3).

## Results

Several of the other variables (department, primary emphasis, certification, publication rate and experience) were determined to be confounders, while rank was found to be an interaction. High collinearity was found between publication rate and primary emphasis as well as publication and department, so publication rate was dropped from the model. The final model shows that gender is not significant in determining salary (p-value 0.186) when controlling for department, primary emphasis, certification, experience and rank. Associated p values for other variables are also provided. It is interesting to note that rank, overall as a variable is significantly associated with salary. However, when examining the individual levels, only full-time professors were significant. The model shows an adjusted  $R^2$  value of .9322, meaning that 93% of the variability of the data is represented by the model. Cook's distance, quantile-quantile plot, and residuals plots show that the 184th observation is an influential point (supplemental figure 2). The influential point was kept in the model since the goal was to build a model for association.

## Conclusion/Discussion

Based on the data set, gender demonstrates no association with salary from 1994 and 1995 after adjusting for department affiliation, clinical emphasis, board certification status, rank, and experience. Therefore, we conclude that the data does not support the claim of gender discrimination in setting salaries at Houston College of Medicine. Moreover, department, clinical or research emphasis, board certified or not, and years of experience confound the association between salaries and gender. It's important to note that rank interacts with gender, meaning that salary among male and female physicians differ depending on the position held. The difference in salaries between male and female physicians at the Houston College of Medicine could be due to other factors, particularly rank since the claim on the failure in giving promotions to female faculty member was also in the lawsuit.

Under the assumption that Houston College of Medicine, like most universities, operates under a tenure system, where salary is based on academic productivity, women in Houston College would get paid less based on the unproportional distribution of male full time professors compared to female full time professors, seen in (Supplemental table 1) (Reed et al, 2011). Other studies have also shown that differences in salaries between male and female physicians may be due to characteristic differences that are affiliated with gender roles such as specialty choice, number of hours worked, practice setting, and work-life balance (Baker, 1996 and Butkus et al, 2018).

Futhermore, it was determined that physician 184 is an influential point based on the standardized residuals. Physician 184 is a male uncertified assistant professor in the department of medicine, with a research emphasis, a 5.1 publication rate, and has 2 years experience since obtaining MD. With all things considered, physician 184 has an unusually high salary. This could be due to other factors that were not included in this data set such as the importance of research and publication this particular physician was involved in or the number of hours he works.