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Compatibility of Family Planning and Surgical Training in Switzerland

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Background: Surgeons undertake a long training and have stressful work schedules during optimal child bearing age. Training and career plans can entice young surgeons to renounce part-time work and delay pregnancy, risking pregnancy complications and infertility.

Aims: This survey study aims to determine the prevalence and constraints of part-time work and family planning among young surgeons in Switzerland.

Methods: An anonymous, voluntary survey was distributed to young board-certified surgeons. It queried work schedules and desire for part-time work as well as history of pregnancies and use of assisted reproductive treatment.

Results: A total of 375 surgeons participated, 308 were included (157 female, 151 male). There were no differences in current age (male median 37 (IQR 5), female 37 (6), p=0.93), median age at medical school graduation (male 26 (2), female 26 (2), p=0.90), and mean time to board certification (male 8.3 (SD 2.4), female 8.2 (SD 2.7), p=0.61). Female surgeons had a higher rate of part-time employment (38% vs 19%, p=0.0002). More male surgeons had children compared to their female counterparts (70% vs 45%, p<0.0001). Female surgeons were older (median 35 (IQR 4.5)) than male surgeons (median 33.5 (IQR 3.25), p=0.0002) and female partners of male surgeons (median 32 (IQR 3), p<0.0001) at birth of their first child. Female surgeons more frequently desired further children (71% vs 38%, p<0.0001) and delayed pregnancy due to training (74% vs 22%, p<0.0001). Female surgeons had longer time to conceive (>12 months 24% vs 10%, p=0.014), lower spontaneous pregnancy rates (82% vs 93%, p=0.029) and higher rates of assisted reproductive treatment (14% vs 4%, p=0.0089). Female surgeons more frequently perceived their gender as a negative career influence (67% vs 5%, p<0.0001).

Conclusion: Whilst part-time work and family planning are challenging for surgeons of both genders, female surgeons face striking inequities when trying to consolidate family planning with their profession.