The gender pay gap is a symptom of the pervasive inequalities inherent in modern society. Among doctors, the gap has been increasing. The Gender Pay Gap in Medicine Review is exploring the scale of the problem and the reasons behind it. Although motherhood and flexible working both contribute to the salary discrepancy, the aetiology is complex and multifactorial, with important roles played by recruitment and representation of women at senior levels, as well as gender occupational segregation. Addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and shining a light on the pay gap data are both required in order to one day close the gap.

INTRODUCTION

The gender pay gap is paradigmatic of gender inequality in medicine and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and a critical topic to consider when discussing such themes. This section will define the gender pay gap, and explain how it is researched. The implications of the pay gap will also be explored, including the effects on employee well-being. Up-to-date figures will be provided for the gender pay gap in medicine. These will be compared to the pay gap elsewhere in STEM, as well as to national and international averages. Putative causes will be outlined in order to combat prevalent myths on the topic. The chapter will end with potential solutions and reasons to be optimistic that the gap will improve.
The Gender Pay Gap in Medicine

BACKGROUND

The gender pay gap is the difference between the average hourly earnings of men and women (Topping & Barr, 2018). It is pervasive across different disciplines, and medicine is no exception. It is also not a new phenomenon. Women’s work has been assigned a lower value than men’s work throughout history (Griffin, 2018). This has allowed men to excel in their professional lives, while encouraging women to take on the greater share of domestic work.

The pay gap has persisted despite the Equal Pay Act 1970 and Equality Act 2010, which enshrined in law the entitlement for men and women to be paid equally for work of equal value. The UK currently ranks 20th in gender equality on the list of nations by the World Economic Forum (Chapman, 2017).

The Gender Pay Gap in Medicine Review

In July 2016, then-Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt commissioned an independent report into the gender pay gap in medicine chaired by Professor Jane Dacre, which included an analysis of lifetime gender pay differences and the gender pensions gap (Medical Women’s Federation, 2018b). The research – the largest examination of gender pay data conducted in the public sector – is led by Carol Woodhams at the University of Surrey (Medical Women’s Federation, 2019; Rimmer, 2018). The approach to analysing the pay gap included performing quantitative analysis of existing data, circulating workforce surveys, and using mathematical modelling to determine the size of the overall gender pay gap and break it down into individual components. Interim results were published in early 2019, and the final report and recommendations are due to be published in September 2019 (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019).

Women: Like Men, Only Cheaper?

‘I should like to buy an egg, please,’ she said timidly. ‘How do you sell them?’

‘Fivepence farthing for one — Twopence for two,’ the Sheep replied.

‘Then two are cheaper than one?’ Alice said in a surprised tone. (Alice Through the Looking Glass, by Lewis Carroll, 1871)

Britain has one of the widest gaps in salary between men and women in Europe (“Forcing employers to reveal their gender pay gaps is making them think,” 2018). In the UK, full-time male employees earned 9.4% more than female employees in 2016. This pay gap was the lowest on record, and down from 17.4% in 1997 (The Office For National Statistics, 2016). The gap for all employees (full-time and part-time) reduced from 27.5% in 1997 to 18.1% in 2016. Although this looks promising, it has been predicted that the gap will not close until 2069 (Codd, 2016). The hourly pay gap between full-time men and women is closing at a rate of only 2.5 pence per year in the UK. Globally, the gap is widening, as men’s earnings are increasing more rapidly than women’s (Harris, 2017).