

Gender Differences in Medical Evaluations: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Doctors

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Key Findings and Policy Implications

This paper examines the impact of gender match between doctors and patients on eligibility determinations for medically screened social insurance benefits. The study uses comprehensive administrative data from the workers' compensation system in Texas, which randomly assigns doctors to patients for medical evaluations. The paper finds that:

- Female claimants are 3.1 percentage points less likely than male claimants to be assessed as having a continued disability when both are assessed by male doctors.
- Female patients randomly assigned a female doctor rather than a male doctor are 5.0% more likely to be evaluated as disabled and receive 8.5% more subsequent cash benefits on average. There is no analogous gender-match effect for male patients.
- The magnitude of these effects implies that having female doctors evaluate patients entirely offsets the observed gender gap in the likelihood of being evaluated as disabled when male doctors evaluate patients.

The findings suggest that differential evaluations of female patients by male and female doctors likely play a role in differential outcomes for male and female patients. A natural corollary of these implications is that the under-representation of female doctors is likely an important contributing factor behind observed gender disparities in health care settings, including those related to benefit determinations. More broadly, our findings highlight the potential importance of gender match in settings where authority figures evaluate women.

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