Thematic analysis of free-text responses to the 2018 survey of AABP members about gender bias

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Introduction

The percentage of women in veterinary medicine passed 50% in 2009, but the percentage of women in bovine practice has not reached that level. Reasons for this are not completely clear, and discussions within and outside AABP have led to speculation about the extent and perception of gender bias among bovine practitioners. Therefore, in 2018, AABP members were surveyed to learn their perceptions about gender bias in clinical practice settings.

Materials and Methods

For the survey, the working definition of gender bias was "when a member of 1 gender is advantaged or disadvantaged for the reason of their gender." Survey questions were designed to capture perceptions about personal experiences in job seeking, hiring, and working as an associate or owner; some questions were also modeled on institutional climate surveys and data in the literature on veterinary hiring. The survey was piloted on a convenience sample of bovine practitioners and was then made available through member login to the AABP website, although identification was stripped from the data prior to analysis to maintain anonymity. The survey was deemed exempt from review by the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University. Thematic analysis based on the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) was performed on responses to a free-text question about encountering gender bias in veterinary practice, as well as on write-in responses about job seeking, hiring, leaving jobs, and careers. For thematic analysis, text was read multiple times, initial codes were generated and adjusted, and extracts of text were coded and re-coded and then sorted into themes, which were iteratively revised and reorganized. Extracts related to each theme were also counted.

Results

The highest number of comments was for the question on encountering gender bias, which 233 respondents answered. Number of comments from other questions ranged from 14 to 101. Categories of themes identified included "Gender-related differential treatment or attitude," "Non-gender-related differential treatment or attitude," "Reasons jobs are not offered/not accepted/left," "Counterpoint," and "Who is involved in differential treatment or jobs not offered/not accepted/left." The themes with the highest numbers of comments in the category of "Gender-related differential treatment or attitude" were "Don't want women: physical strength or stamina" (n=87) and "Don't want women: ask for male veterinarian" (n=67). Other themes with high numbers of comments were in the category of "Reasons jobs not offered/not accepted/left": "Salary/money" (n=126) and "Fit or atmosphere" (n=56). When identified, clients were identified in 156 comments as being involved in differential treatment or jobs not offered/not accepted/left, and veterinarians were identified as being involved in 75 comments.

Significance

Although the proportion of AABP members responding was small, examination of experiences and perceptions of gender bias among respondents led to the emergence of common themes. The design and response rate of the survey did not allow for an accurate estimate of how often these themes are encountered, but differential treatment related to gender bears further examination among bovine practitioners.