

Gender equity in Indian dermatology: Are we moving in the right direction?

On behalf of the entire *IJDVL* editorial team, I wish all our fellow contributors, reviewers, readers and publishing house members, a very productive and happy 2025! We at *IJDVL*, the official journal of IADVL, extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your invaluable support and faith in us. We are determined to continuously enhance the journal's prestige by focusing on the publication of good-quality, impactful and high-evidence articles and timely decisions.

Dermatology has become the most sought-after medical speciality in India and globally.¹ It is conventionally considered a 'woman-friendly field,' given the associated better lifestyle due to fewer emergencies, flexible working hours and lucrative monetary opportunities. Despite this, for over three decades, there has been an ongoing debate about the underrepresentation of women in academic dermatology and leadership positions. In a questionnaire-based survey in 1994, Pincus S reported no gender-specific discrepancy during residency programs in the United States of America. However, considerably fewer women held senior academic or administrative positions.² According to the Federal Council of Medicine's demographic data from 2020, the medical speciality with the highest number of women was dermatology in Brazil, accounting for 77.9% of the total of 9,078 specialists³; however, women holding top leadership positions were only a handful. Women's Dermatological Society (WDS) was established in 1973 to address the poor presence of women in authoritative positions. WDS plays a pivotal role in networking, mentoring and leadership opportunities for women dermatologists across the globe. A recently published review on 'Gender equity in academic dermatology' discusses three important aspects: (1) The evidence for gender equity in various domains of academic dermatology (headship, editor and editorial appointments, conference presentations, etc.). (2) Identification of challenges to achieve gender equity. (3) Designing a multipronged strategy to achieve gender parity.⁴

Notwithstanding the subtle undercurrents, the issue of gender disparity in dermatology is seldom discussed openly in academic forums in India. The Indian Association of

Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL), established in 1973, is the second largest dermatologists' association in the world with over 17,000 members. However, in 51 years of its existence, IADVL has had only two women presidents.⁵ Similarly, in the 89-year long journey of *IJDVL*, Prof. Rachel Mathai of the Christian Medical College, Vellore, was the first woman editor-in-chief during 1977–1983, after almost 50-years of its inception.⁶ However, that was also the time when woman dermatologists were far and few in India. Dermatology as a speciality did not attract women's attention till the nineties. In addition, women inherently prioritise family responsibilities and raising kids over professional career advancements and leadership roles.

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of gender-specific database of IADVL members at the national as well as state levels to comment accurately about gender disparity or underrepresentation of women in Indian dermatology. At present, there is a visible predominance of women amongst residents and young faculty members. Ironically this paradigm shift in the demography is yet to reflect in women holding top leadership positions.

Forty per cent of women members stand testimony to their impressive representation in the editorial board of *IJDVL*. It is heartening to see that 50% of most special interest groups (SIGs) of IADVL are women and one SIG comprises 100% women members.⁷ We are also witnessing a significant change in women's representation in the executive committee of IADVL, an impressive trend indeed. There is a notable increase in gender equity amongst the speakers in the national and other conferences of IADVL. Let us ensure this change sustains.

I am proud to be the second woman editor of *IJDVL*, the dermatology journal ranked first in Asia. Like many, I too have taught, mothered and (wo)mentored for over 30 years! May there be more and more 'womentors' in academic and clinical dermatology in India. I want to end this editorial with some lines penned by an anonymous poet, 'In every challenge her spirit soars, breaking barriers, opening doors.'

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Viva IJDVL! Viva IADVL!

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