

Guest Editorial

Women ophthalmologists: Successes and future challenges

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In this special issue of the *Global Journal of Cataract Surgery and Research in Ophthalmology*, we celebrate the remarkable contributions of women ophthalmologists. The increase of female ophthalmologists has transformed our profession. Today, women lead in ground-breaking research, innovations in surgical techniques, and academic and professional education.

It is hard to imagine that in 1969, women comprised only 4% of ophthalmologists.^[1] When we put this into a historical perspective, we can see the 'why'. In 1970, American women did not have the right to open a credit account; it is hard to imagine how a woman could fund a career. In India, it was not until 1976 that the Equal Remuneration Act was implemented, mandating that employers pay equal remuneration to men and women. The 1970s were a time for change; women were obtaining rights and opportunities. For the next 30 years, women studied and overcame obstacles to earn their degrees in ophthalmology. By 2000, the percentage of women in ophthalmology had increased to 18% globally.^[1]

Today, in 2024, nearly 30-35% of ophthalmologists worldwide are women.^[1] This growth reflects women's extraordinary commitment and tenacity to pursue education and academic success. It is also a result of the tireless efforts of many to obtain legal rights for women. Let us celebrate every female ophthalmologist because each woman has had to overcome inequities, prejudices and barriers to earn her title. Ophthalmology is better because 'she' prevailed.

As we move forward, there is still work to be done; with almost 35% of ophthalmologists being female, women are underrepresented in academic positions, achievement awards and leadership roles.^[2] Women have proven that they have the skills, intellect and talent to excel in these roles, and it is time for academia and industry to remove the attitudes and barriers that hinder progress. A recent report from McKinsey and Company states, 'Companies with more women on their

boards perform better financially, with a 28% higher value than those with fewer women on boards.'^[3]

Finally, as we celebrate women in ophthalmology, we must include their safety. As a society, we are faced with the shameful reality of violence against women. Estimates published by the World Health Organization indicate that about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.^[4] Globally, as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.^[4]

As our colleagues have reported, ophthalmologists have a role in diagnosing and treating intimate partner violence (IPV). Dr. Erin M. Shriver stated, 'Forty-five percent of injuries caused by partner violence involve eye injuries.'^[5,6] Ophthalmologists are taking care of patients who are victims of violence and can help these women with proper interventions. We need to educate ourselves about IPV and provide proper referrals and care for our patients. This information is available online at the Academy of Ophthalmology EyeNet.^[6]

In this issue, let us honour the achievements of women in ophthalmology. The journey from 4% to 35% female ophthalmologists is a testament to what is possible. In the years ahead, let us continue to advocate for women through our actions, collaborations, and innovations and use our voices to advocate for women. As doctors, let us condemn this violence against women. Change happens when we all work to educate and advocate for this basic right.

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