

**PERCEPTIONS OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS ON THE SCOPE AND ROLE OF FAMILY MEDICINE: A SURVEY ON HEALTHCARE SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN**

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**Abstract:** *This study aimed to explore healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the scope and role of family medicine in the healthcare system of Pakistan. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among undergraduate students (n=170) and professional doctors (n=130) in Pakistan. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire that assessed knowledge, attitudes, and career choices related to family medicine. The findings revealed that many participants demonstrated knowledge of family medicine as a specialty. Both undergraduate students and professional doctors expressed positive attitudes toward family medicine as a career choice. However, a higher percentage of professional doctors had knowledge of family medicine compared to undergraduate students. The study also highlighted the potential impact of creating specialist posts in family medicine in encouraging healthcare professionals to choose it as a career. The study's results indicate a growing recognition and acceptance of family medicine as a vital component of the healthcare system in Pakistan. Efforts should be made to enhance awareness and knowledge of family medicine among undergraduate students, promote interprofessional collaboration, and support evidence-based policymaking to strengthen the role of family medicine. These measures can improve healthcare access, quality, and outcomes in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Perceptions, Health Care Professionals, Family Medicine, Healthcare System, General Practitioners

## Introduction

Family medicine plays a vital role in the healthcare system of Pakistan, serving as a cornerstone for comprehensive primary care. It encompasses a holistic approach to healthcare, addressing the diverse health needs of individuals and families across the lifespan. Family medicine extends beyond treating acute illnesses, focusing on preventive care, health promotion, and ongoing management of chronic conditions (Sabzwari, 2015). In Pakistan, where the healthcare landscape faces numerous challenges, understanding healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the scope and role of family medicine is crucial. The opinions and experiences of these professionals can provide valuable insights into the current state of family medicine and its potential to improve healthcare delivery (Atif et al., 2022). The findings from this study can inform healthcare policymakers, administrators, and educators about the importance of family medicine in meeting the evolving healthcare needs of the Pakistani population. Additionally, the insights gained can contribute to developing strategies and interventions that promote

the integration and advancement of family medicine within the broader healthcare system (Sohail et al., 2020).

Overall, this research seeks to shed light on the perceptions and attitudes of healthcare professionals toward family medicine in Pakistan, ultimately aiming to enhance the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of primary healthcare services. By recognizing the value and potential of family medicine, we can work towards strengthening the healthcare system, improving patient outcomes, and promoting the well-being of individuals and families throughout the country (Qidwai, 2015). Family medicine plays a crucial role in the healthcare system of Pakistan, catering to the diverse health needs of individuals and families across the country. It is a discipline that provides comprehensive, continuous, and patient-centered care, emphasizing preventive measures, early detection of diseases, and effective management of chronic conditions. Family medicine extends beyond the traditional focus on acute care, encompassing health promotion, disease prevention,

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and care coordination among healthcare providers (JS, 2016).

The fundamental medical care arrangement of any nation mostly comprises family doctors or general specialists, who are answerable for giving essential medical care to the local area. This medical care proficient have crucial jobs for the essential medical care system. The headway of innovation and simple access to the most recent information has changed medical care frameworks all over the planet (Ahmad, 2016). The fundamental focal point of this advanced medical services framework is on giving local area-arranged essential medical services. Family doctors have a relationship with families since they are extraordinarily qualified to act as quiet backers in well-being-related issues and to utilize references to experts, local area assets, and well-being administrations (Al-Motlaq and Shields, 2017). The proficiency of essential medical care arrangements in any country relies on the nature of the medical services framework. The presentation of family medication can build the effectiveness of the medical services framework. Different benefits of family medication consideration in the medical care framework comprise cost adequacy from there, and the sky is the limit advantageous for the patients and thus for the country (Khan et al., 2018).

In Pakistan, a country facing significant healthcare challenges, healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the scope and role of family medicine are of utmost importance. Understanding these perceptions can provide valuable insights into the barriers, facilitators, and potential strategies for strengthening family medicine in the healthcare system. This study explores the perceptions of healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers, regarding the scope and role of family medicine in Pakistan. By conducting interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions, we will gather in-depth information about their experiences, attitudes, and expectations related to family medicine (Weinstein, 2016). The study's main objective is to find the scope and role of family medicine in the health care system of Pakistan.

## Methodology

This research utilized a cross-sectional study design to explore healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the scope and role of family medicine in the healthcare system of Pakistan.

Participants:

A total of 300 healthcare professionals were recruited for this study. The participants included physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers working in

various healthcare settings, including hospitals, clinics, and community health centers across Pakistan. The participants were selected through a combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling to ensure representation from diverse healthcare disciplines and geographical areas.

Healthcare professionals in Pakistan include physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers; participants with at least one year of experience in their respective healthcare roles; and individuals willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent voluntarily were included in the study. Whereas healthcare professionals specializing in a field outside the scope of family medicine, such as surgeons or specialists in a particular medical discipline, were excluded from the study.

Data collection involved the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The structured questionnaires were administered to gather quantitative data, while the semi-structured interviews aimed to capture qualitative insights. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants in person or electronically, depending on their preferred mode of participation. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via teleconferencing, allowing for in-depth discussions and exploring participants' perceptions and experiences. The structured questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-scale items, addressing various aspects related to the scope and role of family medicine. It included questions about the participants' awareness of family medicine, their perceptions of its effectiveness in addressing healthcare needs, and their experiences collaborating with family medicine practitioners. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for open-ended discussions on the benefits, challenges, and prospects of family medicine in Pakistan.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The themes and patterns emerging from the data were identified, coded, and categorized to understand the participant's perceptions comprehensively.

## Results

Three hundred healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers, participated in the study. The demographic data, including gender distribution and years of experience, is shown in Tables 1, 2, and 1.

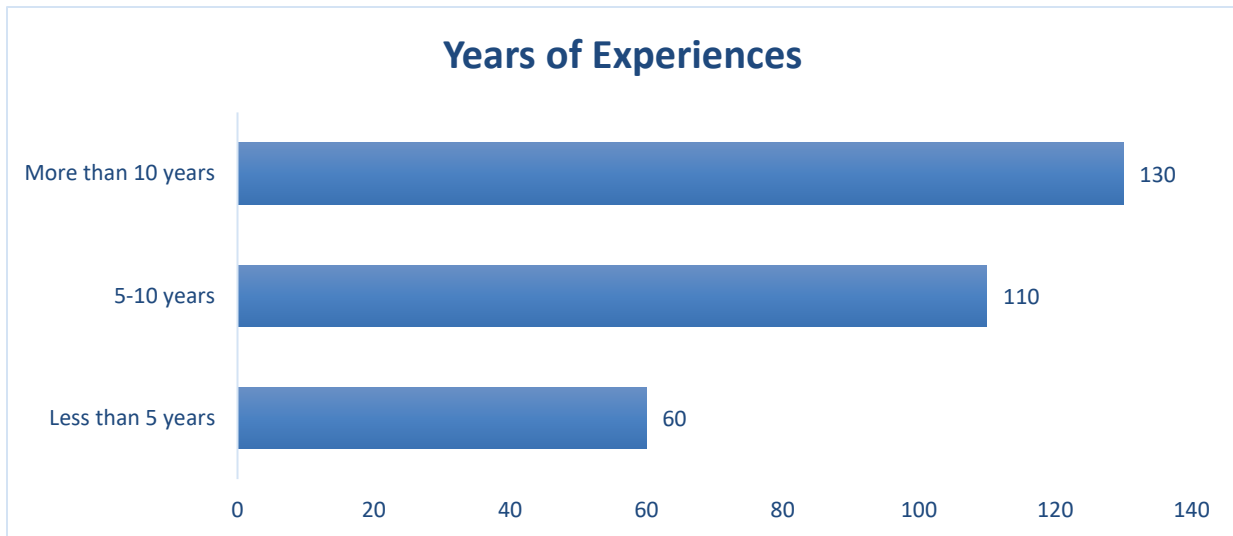


Figure 1: Duration of experience of our study population

The results of the study provide insights into the perceptions of these professionals regarding the scope and role of family medicine in the healthcare system of Pakistan.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following key themes:

**Holistic and Patient-Centered Care:** Many healthcare professionals expressed that family medicine embraces a holistic approach, addressing the physical, mental, and social aspects of patient care. They emphasized the importance of patient-centered care, building long-term relationships, and considering the context of the patient's life in treatment plans.

**Preventive Care and Health Promotion:** Participants recognized the role of family medicine in preventive care and health promotion. They highlighted the significance of early detection, screening, and lifestyle interventions in preventing and managing chronic diseases.

**Primary Point of Contact:** Several healthcare professionals viewed family medicine as the primary point of contact for patients, facilitating continuity of care and serving as a gateway to other healthcare services.

Table 01: Demographic study characteristics of participants

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	120	40%
Female	180	60%
<b>Profession</b>		
Physician	150	50%
Nurse	80	26.7%
Other Healthcare Providers	70	23.3%
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
Less than 5 years	60	20%
5-10 years	110	36.7%
More than 10 years	130	43.3%
<b>Healthcare Setting</b>		
Hospital	160	53.3%
Clinic	80	26.7%
Community Health Center	60	20%
<b>Region</b>		
Northern Region	90	30%
Southern Region	100	33.3%
Central Region	60	20%
Western Region	50	16.7%

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Challenges and Opportunities: While many participants acknowledged the benefits of family medicine, they also highlighted challenges such as limited resources, inadequate recognition, and the need for more training programs. However, they identified opportunities for enhancing the role of family medicine through increased collaboration, policy support, and public awareness campaigns.

Overall, the findings indicate a positive perception of family medicine among healthcare professionals in Pakistan. They recognize the importance of family medicine in providing comprehensive, patient-centered care and value its role in preventive care and health promotion. However, challenges such as resource limitations and needing further training and support were also identified.

**Table 02: Comparison of knowledge and choice of family medicine as a career**

Participant Group	Knowledge of Family Medicine (%)	Choice of Family Medicine as Career (%)
Undergraduate Students	70%	45%
Professional Doctors	90%	75%

**Table 03: Distribution and comparison of knowledge and choice of family medicine as a career among undergraduate students and professional doctors**

Questions	Undergraduate (n=170)	Professional Doctors (n=130)	P-Value
<b>Did you know about Family Medicine as Speciality?</b>			
Yes	80 (47.06%)	100 (76.92%)	0.0001 *
No	90 (52.94%)	30 (23.08%)	
<b>Do you think creating a family medicine specialist post can encourage health care professionals to select family medicine as a career?</b>			
Yes	147 (86.47%)	120 (92.31%)	0.6142 **
No	23 (13.53%)	10 (7.69%)	
<b>Can comprehensive primary health care family medicine improve the Pakistani health care system?</b>			
Yes	145 (85.29%)	125 (96.15%)	0.0708 **
No	25 (14.70%)	5 (3.85%)	
<b>Before this session, do you think family medicine could be your consideration as a career speciality?</b>			
Yes	71 (41.76%)	95 (73.08%)	0.0000 *
No	99 (58.23%)	35 (26.92%)	
<b>Do you think family medicine is a career speciality after the session?</b>			
Yes	105 (61.76%)	110 (84.62%)	0.0004 *
No	65 (38.23%)	20 (15.38%)	

**Discussion**

In this study, the perceptions of healthcare professionals regarding the scope and role of family medicine in the healthcare system of Pakistan were explored. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of healthcare professionals, both undergraduate students and professional doctors, demonstrated knowledge of family medicine as a speciality. Moreover, many participants were positively inclined toward family medicine as a career choice (Iqbal, 2013). The discussion begins by acknowledging the importance of understanding the perceptions of healthcare professionals towards family medicine in order to identify potential gaps and barriers in its integration within the healthcare system. The findings of this study align with previous research indicating a growing recognition and acceptance of family medicine as a vital component of primary healthcare (Murad et al., 2022). The study's results showed a higher percentage of professional doctors having family medicine

knowledge than undergraduate students. This discrepancy could be attributed to the exposure and experience gained by professional doctors during their medical training and practice. It highlights the need to enhance educational efforts and promote awareness among undergraduate students about the scope and benefits of family medicine [(Yousafzai and Huda, 2018). The discussion also explores the potential impact of creating specialist posts in family medicine on attracting healthcare professionals to this field (Hashim, 2016). Most participants, irrespective of their professional status, believed that establishing such posts could encourage more individuals to choose family medicine as a career. This finding underscores the importance of policy interventions and healthcare system reforms to promote family medicine as a viable career option (Paid et al., 2022). Overall, the study's findings provide valuable insights into healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the scope and role of family medicine in Pakistan. The discussion contextualizes these findings within the

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existing literature and underscores the significance of promoting family medicine as a critical component of the healthcare system. The study's implications can guide policymakers and stakeholders in developing targeted interventions to enhance the role of family medicine and improve healthcare delivery in Pakistan (Elagi et al., 2019).

The study's findings indicate a positive attitude toward family medicine as a career choice among healthcare professionals. This is encouraging as it suggests a growing recognition of the importance of primary healthcare and the need for well-trained family medicine specialists. The discussion emphasizes the need for educational institutions and professional bodies to prioritize family medicine training and create career pathways that incentivize healthcare professionals to choose family medicine as their specialty. Another important aspect discussed is the need for interprofessional collaboration and teamwork in the healthcare system. The study highlights the role of family medicine in promoting collaborative approaches and interdisciplinary teamwork among healthcare professionals. This can lead to more effective and coordinated care, better patient outcomes, and improved healthcare system efficiency. The discussion emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture of collaboration and interprofessional education to maximize the potential of family medicine in the Pakistani healthcare system (Khan et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the scope and role of family medicine in the healthcare system of Pakistan. The findings shed light on the knowledge, attitudes, and career choices related to family medicine among undergraduate and professional doctors. The study revealed that many participants demonstrated knowledge of family medicine as a specialty and expressed positive attitudes toward its role in healthcare.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declared an absence of conflict of interest.

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