



New study explains how women took over the veterinary profession

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Women now dominate the field of veterinary medicine - the result of a nearly 40-year trend that is likely to repeat itself in the fields of medicine and law.

That's the conclusion of a new study that found three factors that appear to be driving the change: the 1972 federal amendment that outlaws discrimination against female students; male applicants to graduate schools who may be deterred by a growing number of women enrolling; and the increasing number of women earning Bachelor's degrees in numbers that far exceed those of male graduates, says sociologist Anne E. Lincoln.

An assistant professor in the department of sociology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, USA Lincoln is an expert on how occupations transition from being either male- or female-dominated. Her study is the first of its kind to analyze the feminization of veterinary medicine from the perspective of examining the pool of applicant data to U.S. veterinary medical colleges from 1975 to 1995.

Shift after passage of Title IX

In 1960, the U.S. Census reported that the field of veterinary medicine was 98 percent male, Lincoln found. For the academic year 1969-70, the national average for veterinary medical college male enrollment was 89 percent. Veterinary medicine began to shift after the 1972 passage of Title IX, the federal amendment that prohibits discrimination against female students. The amendment forever altered the way vet med colleges responded to female applicants, Lincoln said. "I found that after 1972, when the barriers to entry were dropped, women began enrolling in larger numbers," Lincoln said. "Male applicants dropped sharply after 1976, the first year that applicant statistics were collected."

Today it's 50-50

By 2008-09, the national average for veterinary medicine male enrollment had declined to 22.4

percent. Cornell University's enrollment, for example, is currently more than 80 percent female, according to the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges. "It's really remarkable that in the past 50 years the pendulum has swung the other direction. Today it's 50-50," she said. "It takes time for the men to cycle out. But because the number of women enrolled has been greater than the number of men since 1984, there's been a wave of women entering the profession." "That's why this study is really pushing the boundaries," Lincoln said. "This is an occupation that is changing even as I analyze it, so I can watch it as it's changing. Indications are that it will continue to shift even further toward women, beyond the current 50-50."

Feminization likely for law, medicine professions

The same phenomenon likely will be seen in coming years in the male-dominated fields of medicine and law, given the increasing numbers of women now entering those fields. "We can use veterinary medicine as a predictor of what is going to happen in medicine and law," Lincoln said. "It may take 27 years for medicine and law to become gender-integrated. The pharmacist profession earlier experienced this 'occupational jostling.' It takes decades for a profession to feminize because an occupation that is mostly male is going to have generational turnover as the more senior practitioners retire."