



## THE IMPACT OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDER BIAS ON PATIENT CARE

Mustafa Mohammad Reda Kadhim Almirza<sup>1\*</sup>, Alshehri, Ali Abdulrahman A<sup>2</sup>, Zainab Nuri A Alghirash<sup>3</sup>, Al Khalefah, Ali Hussain A<sup>4</sup>, Al Ghasham, Abdulkhaleq Mousa N<sup>5</sup>, Alaithan, Fatimah Mohammed A<sup>6</sup>, Basmah Ali Aoun Alsayafi<sup>7</sup>, Al Lowimi, Jawad Hussain Jawad<sup>8</sup>, Ali Ahmed Alali<sup>9</sup>, Jassem Ibrahim Al Hassan<sup>10</sup>, Ali Salman Ahmed Al Omaishi<sup>11</sup>, Amnah Nuri Algharash<sup>12</sup>, Ahmed Mohammed Salman Alghareeb<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Biomedical Equipment Medical device technician, Alnyirha hospital General, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>2</sup>General dentist, Albarzah PHC, Makkah health cluster, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>3</sup>Dental Hygienist, Alahsa medical health cluster, dental department in Southern region, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>4</sup>Ambulance Transport Department, Alahsa, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>5</sup>Specialist-Radiological Technology, Salwa general hospital, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>6</sup>Nurse specialist, Alomran general hospital, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>7</sup>Medical secretarial technician, Prince Saud Bin Jalawy Hospital, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>8</sup>Laboratory technician, Al Omran General Hospital, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>9</sup>Radiology Technologist, Prince saoud bin Jalawi hospital, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>10</sup>Staff Nurse, Psychiatric hospital alhassa, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>11</sup>Staff Nurse, Omran General Hospital, Alahsa, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>12</sup>Nurse specialist, Primary Health Care Alhassa, bachelor's in nursing, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University Dammam. Alhassa Eastern Region, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>13</sup>Medical laboratory, Uyun city hospital, Alahsaa, Saudi Arabia.

**\*Corresponding Author:** Mustafa Mohammad Reda Kadhim Almirza

**\*Biomedical Equipment Medical device technician, Alnyirha hospital General, Saudi Arabia.**

### Abstract:

Healthcare provider bias is a critical issue that significantly influences the quality of patient care and outcomes. This review article examines the various forms of bias exhibited by healthcare providers, such as racial, gender, and socioeconomic biases, and their impact on patient care. The review synthesizes current research findings on the prevalence of bias in healthcare settings, its effects on patient-provider interactions, treatment decisions, and health disparities. Furthermore, it explores the underlying factors contributing to healthcare provider bias, including implicit biases, stereotypes, and institutional practices. Strategies to mitigate bias and promote equitable care delivery are also discussed, including cultural competency training, diversity initiatives, and policy interventions. Understanding and addressing healthcare provider bias is essential for improving patient outcomes, reducing disparities, and fostering a more inclusive healthcare system.

**Keywords:** Healthcare provider bias, Patient care, Health disparities, Implicit bias, Cultural competency, Inclusive healthcare

**Introduction:**

Healthcare provider bias is a pervasive issue that can have serious consequences for patients. Bias refers to the tendency to favor or disfavor certain individuals or groups based on personal beliefs or stereotypes. In the context of healthcare, provider bias can manifest in various forms, such as racial or ethnic discrimination, gender bias, ageism, or bias against individuals with certain health conditions [1].

One of the most common forms of healthcare provider bias is racial or ethnic bias. Studies have shown that minority patients, particularly those from African American, Hispanic, or Indigenous backgrounds, are more likely to receive lower quality care compared to their white counterparts. This can lead to delayed diagnosis, inappropriate treatment, and poorer health outcomes for minority patients [2].

Gender bias is another prevalent form of healthcare provider bias. Women are often not taken as seriously as men when reporting symptoms, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment. Additionally, transgender individuals may face discrimination and lack of understanding from healthcare providers, which can prevent them from accessing necessary care [3].

Ageism is a form of bias that affects older adults in healthcare settings. Providers may assume that older patients have a lower quality of life or are less capable of making decisions about their care. This can result in older patients receiving less aggressive treatment or being denied certain interventions based on their age [3].

Bias against individuals with certain health conditions, such as mental illness or substance use disorders, is also a significant issue in healthcare. Providers may stigmatize these patients, leading to inadequate treatment and a lack of empathy and understanding for their unique needs. It is important to recognize and address healthcare provider bias in order to ensure that all patients receive equitable and high-quality care. Healthcare organizations can implement training programs to raise awareness about bias and its impact on patient care. Providers can also engage in self-reflection and examine their own biases to prevent them from affecting their interactions with patients [4].

Patients can advocate for themselves by speaking up if they feel they are being treated unfairly due to bias. They can also seek out healthcare providers who are culturally competent and sensitive to their individual needs [2].

**Forms of Bias in Healthcare Settings:**

Bias in healthcare settings is a pervasive issue that can have serious consequences for patient care and outcomes. It can manifest in various forms, from unconscious biases held by healthcare providers to systemic biases embedded in healthcare systems. In this essay, we will explore some of the common forms of bias in healthcare settings and discuss the impact they can have on patient care [5].

- **Implicit Bias**

One of the most insidious forms of bias in healthcare settings is implicit bias. Implicit biases are unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases can shape how healthcare providers interact with patients, leading to disparities in care based on factors such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status [5].

For example, a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that black patients were less likely to receive pain medication than white patients, even when presenting with the same symptoms. This disparity in care can be attributed to implicit biases held by healthcare providers, who may unconsciously believe that black patients experience pain differently or are more likely to abuse pain medications [6].

- **Systemic Bias**

Systemic bias refers to biases that are embedded in healthcare systems and structures, leading to disparities in care based on factors such as race, ethnicity, or income. These biases can manifest in

various ways, such as unequal access to healthcare services, disparities in treatment options, or differential outcomes based on demographic factors [7].

For example, studies have shown that black women are more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women, even when controlling for factors such as income and education. This disparity can be attributed to systemic biases in healthcare systems that result in inadequate access to quality care for black women, leading to poorer outcomes [8].

- **Cultural Bias**

Cultural bias refers to biases that stem from differences in cultural background, beliefs, or practices between healthcare providers and patients. These biases can affect communication, treatment decisions, and overall patient care. For example, a healthcare provider who is not familiar with a patient's cultural practices may unintentionally provide care that is not culturally sensitive or appropriate [9].

To address cultural bias in healthcare settings, it is important for healthcare providers to receive cultural competency training and to actively seek to understand and respect the cultural backgrounds of their patients. By doing so, healthcare providers can ensure that they are providing care that is respectful, effective, and tailored to the individual needs of each patient [9].

Bias in healthcare settings is a complex and multifaceted issue that can have serious implications for patient care and outcomes. By acknowledging and addressing biases, healthcare providers can work towards providing equitable and high-quality care for all patients. It is essential for healthcare organizations to implement policies and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to create a healthcare system that is truly equitable and just [10].

### **Impact of Bias on Patient-Provider Interactions:**

Bias is a pervasive issue in society that can have profound effects on various aspects of life, including healthcare. In the context of patient-provider interactions, bias can significantly impact the quality of care that patients receive, as well as their overall health outcomes. This essay will explore the impact of bias on patient-provider interactions, highlighting the importance of recognizing and addressing bias in healthcare settings [11].

Bias can manifest in many forms, including racial, gender, socioeconomic, and weight bias, among others. When bias influences the way healthcare providers perceive and interact with patients, it can lead to disparities in care and treatment outcomes. For example, studies have shown that racial bias among healthcare providers can result in lower quality care for minority patients, leading to higher rates of misdiagnosis, inadequate treatment, and overall poorer health outcomes [12].

In addition to impacting the quality of care that patients receive, bias can also affect the patient-provider relationship. Patients who perceive bias from their healthcare providers may feel less trust and confidence in the care they are receiving, which can hinder communication and collaboration between the two parties. This lack of trust and communication can further exacerbate disparities in care and treatment outcomes, as patients may be less likely to adhere to treatment plans or seek follow-up care [13].

Furthermore, bias can also influence the way healthcare providers make clinical decisions. Research has shown that unconscious bias can lead to stereotypes and assumptions that can impact the way providers assess and treat patients. For example, a provider may be more likely to prescribe pain medication to a white patient than a black patient, based on stereotypes about pain tolerance. These biased clinical decisions can have serious implications for patient health and well-being [14].

It is important for healthcare providers to be aware of their own biases and take steps to address them in order to provide equitable and high-quality care to all patients. This can involve ongoing education and training on bias awareness, as well as implementing policies and practices that promote cultural competence and diversity in healthcare settings. By actively working to address bias, healthcare providers can help ensure that all patients receive the care and treatment they need to achieve optimal health outcomes [15].

Bias has a significant impact on patient-provider interactions, affecting the quality of care, patient-provider relationships, and clinical decision-making. It is crucial for healthcare providers to recognize and address bias in order to promote equitable and effective healthcare for all patients. By working to overcome bias, healthcare providers can help create a more inclusive and just healthcare system that prioritizes the needs and well-being of all patients [16].

**Influence of Bias on Treatment Decisions:**

Bias plays a significant role in the decision-making process, especially in the field of healthcare. When it comes to treatment decisions, bias can have a profound impact on the quality of care that patients receive. Bias can come in many forms, such as racial bias, gender bias, confirmation bias, and implicit bias. These biases can influence how healthcare providers diagnose, treat, and interact with patients, ultimately affecting patient outcomes [17].

Racial bias, for example, can lead to disparities in healthcare access and treatment. Studies have shown that minority patients are less likely to receive certain treatments or be referred for certain procedures compared to their white counterparts. This can result in poorer health outcomes for minority patients, as they may not receive the same level of care as others. Gender bias is another form of bias that can impact treatment decisions. Women, for instance, may be more likely to have their symptoms dismissed or attributed to psychological factors, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment [18].

Confirmation bias is a cognitive bias that occurs when healthcare providers seek out information that confirms their preconceived beliefs or assumptions. This can lead to tunnel vision and prevent providers from considering alternative diagnoses or treatment options. Confirmation bias can also result in overdiagnosis and overtreatment, as providers may be more likely to recommend unnecessary tests or procedures to confirm their initial suspicions [19].

Implicit bias refers to unconscious stereotypes or attitudes that can influence how healthcare providers perceive and interact with patients. These biases can affect communication, trust, and treatment decisions. For example, a provider may unconsciously assume that a patient from a certain racial or socioeconomic background is less likely to adhere to treatment recommendations, leading to a lack of follow-up or support [15].

The influence of bias on treatment decisions is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires awareness, education, and intervention. Healthcare providers must be trained to recognize and address their own biases, as well as systemic biases within the healthcare system. Cultural competency training, diversity initiatives, and patient-centered care approaches can help reduce the impact of bias on treatment decisions [20].

Bias can have a profound influence on treatment decisions in healthcare. Racial bias, gender bias, confirmation bias, and implicit bias can all impact how patients are diagnosed, treated, and cared for. It is essential for healthcare providers to be aware of their own biases and work towards mitigating their effects on patient care. By addressing bias in healthcare, we can strive to ensure that all patients receive equitable and high-quality treatment [21].

**Health Disparities Resulting from Healthcare Provider Bias:**

Health disparities resulting from healthcare provider bias are a major issue in healthcare systems around the world. Healthcare provider bias refers to the tendency of healthcare professionals to treat patients differently based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other factors. This bias can have serious consequences for patient outcomes, leading to disparities in access to care, quality of care, and health outcomes [22].

One of the most significant health disparities resulting from healthcare provider bias is disparities in access to care. Studies have shown that minority patients are less likely to receive appropriate care compared to white patients, even when controlling for factors such as insurance status and income. This can lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment, as well as poorer health outcomes for minority patients [23].

Healthcare provider bias can also result in disparities in the quality of care that patients receive. Research has shown that minority patients are less likely to receive recommended treatments and preventive care compared to white patients. This can lead to higher rates of complications and poorer health outcomes for minority patients [9].

In addition, healthcare provider bias can contribute to disparities in health outcomes. For example, studies have shown that black patients are more likely to die from certain conditions compared to white patients, even when controlling for factors such as income and education. This disparity in health outcomes is likely due, at least in part, to healthcare provider bias [24].

There are several factors that contribute to healthcare provider bias. One factor is unconscious bias, which refers to the automatic and involuntary stereotypes and attitudes that healthcare providers may hold about certain groups of patients. These biases can influence the way that healthcare providers interact with patients and make treatment decisions [25].

Another factor that contributes to healthcare provider bias is systemic racism and discrimination within the healthcare system. Minority patients are more likely to receive care from providers who are less experienced or who have biases against their racial or ethnic group. This can lead to disparities in the quality of care that patients receive [17].

Addressing healthcare provider bias is crucial for reducing health disparities and improving health outcomes for all patients. One way to address healthcare provider bias is through diversity and cultural competency training for healthcare providers. This training can help providers recognize and address their own biases, as well as improve their communication and understanding of patients from diverse backgrounds [26].

In addition, healthcare organizations can implement policies and practices that promote equity and reduce bias within the healthcare system. For example, organizations can collect and analyze data on patient outcomes by race and ethnicity to identify disparities and develop targeted interventions to address them. Organizations can also implement strategies to increase diversity among healthcare providers, such as recruiting and retaining providers from underrepresented minority groups [27].

Overall, healthcare provider bias is a major contributor to health disparities and must be addressed in order to achieve health equity for all patients. By raising awareness of healthcare provider bias, implementing training and policies to address bias, and promoting diversity within the healthcare system, we can work towards reducing disparities in access to care, quality of care, and health outcomes for all patients [28].

### **Factors Contributing to Healthcare Provider Bias:**

One of the primary factors contributing to healthcare provider bias is unconscious bias. Unconscious bias refers to the attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases are often ingrained in individuals from a young age and can influence how healthcare providers interact with patients. For example, a healthcare provider may unknowingly hold stereotypes about certain racial or ethnic groups, leading to differential treatment of patients based on their race or ethnicity [29].

Another factor contributing to healthcare provider bias is lack of diversity in the healthcare workforce. Research has shown that healthcare providers from minority backgrounds are more likely to provide culturally competent care to patients from similar backgrounds. However, the healthcare workforce remains predominantly white, which can lead to biases in patient care. Additionally, patients from minority backgrounds may feel more comfortable and understood when receiving care from providers who share their cultural background [30].

Socioeconomic factors also play a role in healthcare provider bias. Patients from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face discrimination and bias from healthcare providers due to stereotypes about their ability to adhere to treatment plans or their level of health literacy. This can result in disparities in access to care and health outcomes for patients from disadvantaged backgrounds [31].

Furthermore, time constraints and workload pressure can contribute to healthcare provider bias. In a fast-paced healthcare environment, providers may rely on stereotypes and biases to make quick decisions

about patient care. This can lead to suboptimal treatment and care for patients who are perceived as different or unfamiliar [31].

Education and training also play a crucial role in addressing healthcare provider bias. Many healthcare providers receive limited training on diversity, cultural competence, and unconscious bias, which can perpetuate biases in patient care. By incorporating bias awareness and cultural competency training into medical education and continuing education programs, healthcare providers can become more aware of their biases and learn strategies to mitigate them [30].

Healthcare provider bias is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. Addressing bias in healthcare requires a multifaceted approach that includes increasing diversity in the healthcare workforce, providing education and training on bias awareness and cultural competence, and addressing systemic issues that perpetuate bias. By addressing these factors, healthcare providers can work towards providing equitable and compassionate care to all patients, regardless of their background or characteristics [31].

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, healthcare provider bias is a complex issue that can have serious implications for patient care. By addressing bias in healthcare settings, we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive healthcare system that prioritizes the needs of all patients, regardless of their background or characteristics.

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