



Gender Assessment of Veterinary Services in South-East Asia



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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AVSBN	ASEAN Veterinary Statutory Body Network
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
DFAT	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DG	Director General
DDG	Deputy Director General
DGLAHS	Directorate General of Livestock and Animal Health Services
DLD	Department of Livestock Development
DLF	Department of Livestock and Fisheries
DVM	Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDAH	General Directorate of Animal Health and Production
GDI	Gender Development Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus
OH	One Health
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PVS	Performance of Veterinary Services
RUA	Royal University of Agriculture
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	South-East Asia
SEAVSA	South-East Asia Veterinary School Association
SEAOHUN	Southeast Asia One Health University Network
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAHW	Village Animal Health Worker
VCT	Veterinary Council of Thailand
VEEs	Veterinary Education Establishments
VPPs	Veterinary Paraprofessionals
WOAH	World Organisation for Animal Health
WOAH SRR-SEA	WOAH Sub-regional Representation for Southeast Asia

Gender Assessment of Veterinary Services in South-East Asia

Executive Summary

The Gender Assessment of Veterinary Services in South-East Asia was commissioned by the WOAHA Sub-Regional Representation for South-East Asia (SRR-SEA) to assess the current situation and future trends of gender equality in the Veterinary Services of SEA for veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals (VPPs). The Assessment included 12 countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, PNG¹, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. The study was conducted between February and May 2023. The methodology included administering two online surveys: for in-service professionals (536 responses collected) and for students (134 responses collected). In addition, 29 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. While the surveys were open to people of all genders, the interviews targeted primarily women representing different professional backgrounds in animal health, which helped to better understand women's experiences within the sector.

The feminisation of veterinary professions continues in South-East Asia. With the exception of a few countries participating in this Assessment, women veterinarians either outnumber or reach parity levels with men both in public and private sectors. According to all interviewed academicians, women students currently represent about 70%-80% of pre-service veterinarians in most assessed countries; their numbers are growing in the countries where men vet students are the majority. Within the last eight years, a new trend has emerged: women veterinarians are being promoted to the highest, Ministerial-level positions. However, such cases are still rare. Women are at parity or prevailing in middle-level management positions; however, women may be still facing "glass ceiling" in terms of career progression and salary increases. There are fewer women in the top-level, as well as in the positions that emphasise physical strength and working in rural, remote areas.

Survey and interview respondents mostly expressed a belief that there is gender equality within the veterinary profession in the region; their personal views could be impacted by the specifics of the sample group (e.g., generally high levels of education of the respondents, majority working for the government sector where gender equality could be higher) as well as low awareness of gender inequality. Nonetheless, this assessment shows that there are still many structural barriers that impede women vets from progressing even further. A quarter of all surveyed women report experiencing being treated differently because of their gender. The examples range from minor incidents to serious cases of gender discrimination, including being denied promotion, bullying and sexual harassment.

Young women veterinarians and VPPs appear to be the most vulnerable group facing discrimination due to the compounding effects of age and gender. Despite female graduates entering the job market even somewhat faster than their male peers, they encounter discrimination because of the intersections of age and gender. Young women vets and VPPs may encounter rude and aggressive behaviour by clients, who doubt their capacities; they may not be taken seriously by colleagues and superiors, and report being paid less than their peers who are men.

The assumption that women are not suitable for field work and for treating large animals is still dominant, although it is already changing in some countries, particularly in Malaysia and Thailand.

¹ While not considered a South-East Asian country, PNG was included to the assessment as a country of interest.

At the same time, another trend identified in 2015 - women preferring companion animals to livestock practices - is still pronounced with almost 40% of women student respondents indicating that working with pets is their preferred scenario after graduation. The two second leading “ideal job” scenarios for women were working with farm animals in the private sector (17%) and working for the government (17%). In addition, 65% of all surveyed women students indicated that they are likely to apply for a job in a farm. Unfortunately, a significant number of women participating in the assessment mentioned that they got discouraged from working with large animals during their education. Gender stereotypes entrenched in the education process may be limiting women’s career options. In addition, the veterinary sector may be missing a significant portion of potential workers because of gender biases within the educational system.

Overall, women say that to prove themselves they need to work twice as hard as their men counterparts, as their mistakes are scrutinised more and commonly attributed to their gender. The Assessment found that women vets and VPPs report being promoted less frequently, and their salary increases less often compared to men. In addition, while vets of all genders report that they are expected to work more than regular hours, women are often not ready to sacrifice time with their families given limited institutional support. This, combined with an overall stereotype that women do not work as well as men, lead to women getting less access to opportunities, such as field work, international training, and eventually less opportunities for professional growth, promotion and salary increases.

The assessment found that maintaining work-life balance poses challenges to equal proportion of men and women veterinarians and VPPs: 40.4% of all women respondents and 40.7% of all men respondents reported having such challenges. These challenges come primarily from the nature of veterinary work that includes heavy workload, frequent emergency situations, stress, dealing with life-and-death situations, and work often “spilling over” into personal time. An alarming number of surveyed in-service professionals report having high levels of professional burn out, and the proportions are equal for men and women.

A quarter of all in-service professional respondents reported knowing of formal gender equality policies being in place in the organisations where they worked. However, many had doubts about policy enforcement. Almost all interview respondents supported the idea of having a gender policy document to be introduced in veterinary organisations.

Introduction

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) is an intergovernmental organisation with a mission to improve animal health globally by assisting its Members in building the capacities of national Veterinary Services. Gender is one of the key factors that affects workforce development, as well as socio-economic, political and cultural opportunities of all people. Being free from gender discrimination is one of the fundamental human rights. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) made explicit commitments to gender equality. WOAH's 7th Strategic Plan (2021-2025) mentions value in diversity, fairness and inclusion as 'values' of the organisation which encompass gender equality. In December 2021, WOAH institutionalised its commitment to gender equality by establishing the Gender Task Force, one of the major responsibilities of the group being to promote gender equality across its programmes and launch an institutional Gender Strategy.

The WOAH Sub-Regional Representation for South-East Asia (SRR-SEA) was among the first offices within the organisation to address gender considerations. Supported by the Australian government, WOAH SRR-SEA started to incorporate gender mainstreaming into their programmes as early as in 2008 – 2010. In 2015, the first WOAH Gender Assessment of the Veterinary Services in South-East Asia was conducted. In 2023, still with the support of Australia, WOAH decided to undertake a similar exercise to better understand the progress over the past eight years, the current situation and future trends of gender in the Veterinary Services of SEA (both public and private sectors, including veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals-VPPs). Specifically, the objectives of this study were as follows:

- Objective 1: Collect relevant data, including demographic trends, to understand the current gender situation in the Veterinary Services of SEA;
- Objective 2: Analyse data and develop a comprehensive study report which provides recommendations to better take into account gender in Veterinary Services of SEA; and
- Objective 3: Support wide dissemination of the study and raise awareness on the importance of gender as relates to Veterinary Services.

Background

Feminisation of the veterinary profession is a long-standing global trend. Women constitute about 80% of vet students in Australia, Canada, the US, and the UK (Lofstedt, 2003, Knights and Clarke, 2019, Williams, 2021). At the same time, despite growing women's representation, the veterinary profession remains highly masculine in culture and structure (Knights and Clarke, 2019). The incomes of women vets in US and Canada are lower than those of their men counterparts (Lofstedt, 2003). While disproportionately more women are among the veterinary science graduates, they still occupy less than half of academic positions (and lower ranking compared with men) in Australia/New Zealand, US/Canada and Europe (Liu et.al., 2021). In the UK-based Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, regardless of women representing 57.1% of practicing members, only 6.5% of them are in director-level positions, which is a stark contrast with 24.5% of men (Tindell et. al., 2021). The researchers also noted that in western countries, women vets are more likely to choose companion animals over large animals practice (Lofstedt, 2003). Literature points out that women in the veterinary profession face sexism, stereotyping, constant doubts about their professional qualifications, and are forced to make a choice between career or family (Knights and Clarke, 2019).

The WOAH 2015 Gender Assessment of Veterinary Services in South-East Asia discovered that the region follows many of these global trends. The research underscored the growing numbers of women in the veterinary field, although at that time there were still less women within the

profession in most countries, except Malaysia. In addition, women were not represented at the top-level management positions. The 2015 Assessment also pointed out that the underrepresentation of women in the field/rural areas was determined by external factors, such as safety considerations, rather than by the lack of women’s desire to work with large animals; in fact, the research found that with experience women’s interest in working on farms increased.

Literature suggests that the South-East Asian sub-region is historically less patriarchal than other parts of Asia (Booth, 2016). Women’s agency, particularly related to education, working outside the home, making reproductive choices, are higher in SEA than in many other parts of the world and across religious beliefs (ibid). In 2021, according to the UNDP Gender Development Index (GDI), six out of twelve countries participating in this Assessment were in group 1, which reflects their high achievements in gender equality. GDI measures gender inequalities in three dimensions: health, education, and command over economic resources. GDI is linked to the Human Development Index (HDI). Countries are assigned to GDI groups based on their deviation from absolute gender parity. There are in total 5 groups; countries with deviation of 2.5% or less are classified as group 1 (high equality group), group 2 (medium-high equality group) comprises countries with deviation 2.5-5%, group 3 (medium equality group) - 5-7.5%, group 4 (medium-low equality) - 7.5-10%, and group 5 (low equality) comprises countries with more that 10% of deviation. None of the assessed countries belong to the low equality group. Only one country is in the medium-low equality, and five belong to the medium equality group. SEA demonstrates varied but steady progress towards greater gender equality.

Table 1: Gender Development Index (GDI), UNDP, 2021²			
HDI rank	Country	GDI	
		Value (2021)	Group (2021)
	VERY HIGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	0.986	
12	Singapore	0.992	1
51	Brunei	0.984	1
62	Malaysia	0.982	1
66	Thailand	1.012	1
	HIGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	0.973	
114	Indonesia	0.941	3
115	Vietnam	1.002	1
	MEDIUM HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	0.88	
116	Philippines	0.99	1
140	Lao PDR	0.949	3
140	Timor-Leste	0.917	4
146	Cambodia	0.926	3
149	Myanmar	0.944	3
156	Papua New Guinea ³	0.931	3
	LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	0.864	

² Retrieved on 19 May 2023 from <https://hdr.undp.org/gender-development-index#/indicies/GDI>

³ While not considered a South-East Asian country, PNG was included to the assessment as a country of interest.

Most countries in the region are implementing gender development strategies, laws, and policies. For example, in Lao PDR there is a Law on the Development and Protection of Women and Lao Women's Union has high membership across the country striving to achieve women's empowerment. In Indonesia, there is a Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, and the country's National Medium-Term Development Plan 2020-2024 sets high targets for increasing gender equality and women's empowerment⁴. The situation in the agricultural sector, however, may present a very contrasting reality in terms of gender equity and equality. The series of gender assessments of agriculture and the rural sector conducted by FAO in several countries of the region demonstrated that despite being the backbone of some of the nations' most important economic sectors, women in agriculture are marginalised with little access to finances, modern technologies, and opportunities for knowledge improvement (FAO, 2019). The realities may be especially somber for women from indigenous communities and ethnic minority groups (FAO, 2018).

Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine the specifics of women's professional experiences within the veterinary sector in South-East Asia. Twelve countries participated in this assessment, including all ASEAN members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) plus Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. Secondary sources were analysed to define current gender composition of the veterinary services. The researcher approached national veterinary authorities via email with the request to provide numbers of registered veterinarians and VPPs, disaggregated by gender (see Table 2). This approach had limitations, as data was not always readily available, sometimes gender disaggregation was lacking. The data originating from the private sector was more difficult to obtain than from the public sector. Additionally, a brief literature review was conducted to provide the context for the analysis.

Two online, self-administered surveys were conducted in English for this research from March 3, 2023 to April 14, 2023: one survey targeting in-service professionals and another targeting students; in both cases for vets and VPPs. The surveys were designed, tested, and disseminated using Survey Monkey. The surveys included close-ended and open-ended questions. Responses were anonymous. (Questionnaire templates are attached in Annex 6 and 7).

Convenience sampling was used for both surveys. The link to the in-service professionals' survey was shared with the government authorities in all participating countries with a request to share widely. The survey for students was disseminated through professors teaching veterinary disciplines. As a result, there was a higher response rate for some countries where the administrative push to respond to the survey appeared to be stronger. In some countries, English language and Internet access were significant barriers leading to lower response rate. There was a total of 536 responses to the in-service professionals' survey and a total of 134 responses to the survey for students. Convenience sampling led to certain data biases, for example, the majority of respondents had high levels of education. This will be discussed in more details in the following sections. Surveys data was analysed by using SPSS and excel tables.

Semi-structured interviews with 29 professionals were conducted to deepen the qualitative data obtained through surveys. While the surveys targeted both men and women, the interviews were conducted primarily with women. Four men were interviewed; these interviews didn't focus on

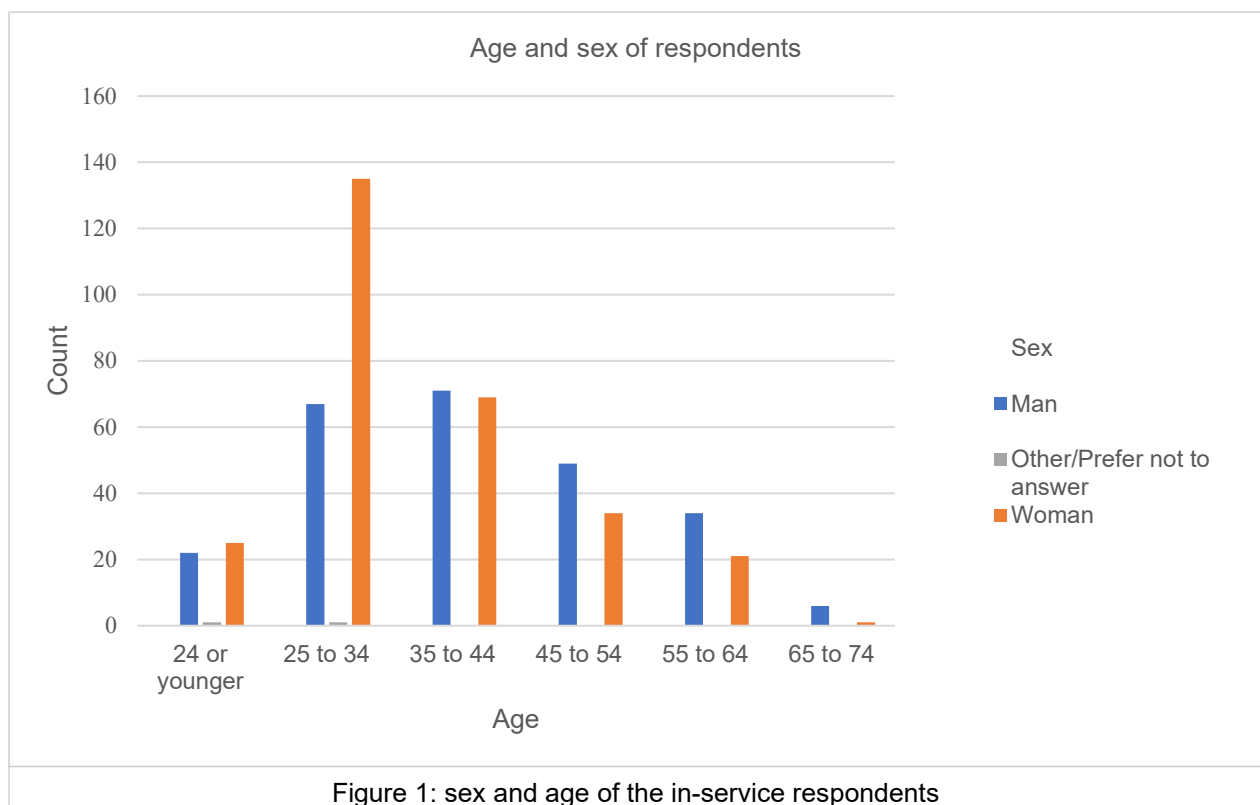
⁴ Medium-Term Development Plan 2020-2024, Indonesia, accessed on 7 May 2023 from <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC204723>

men’s professional experiences but provided better understanding of processes and context in some countries, where women interviewees couldn’t be identified. The interview respondents were also identified by convenience sampling. Most interviewees were recommended by WOA staff, some were identified by government officials. At the same time, the researcher tried to collect a variety of experiences, including those of veterinarians and VPPs, experienced and early career professionals, public and private sector employees. The age of interviewees ranged from 23 to over 60 years old. Representatives of all countries participating in the research were interviewed. Some interviews were conducted in-person, while the majority were conducted via Zoom platform. The full list of interviewees is presented in Annex 2. The interviewees read and signed informed consent form prior to interviews (please see sample of the informed consent form in Annex 9).

Demographics of the survey respondents

In-service professionals

Among survey respondents, 53% were women, 46.6% were men, and 0.4% responded “other/prefer not to answer”. All participating countries were represented in the survey, although the response rates were higher for some countries. The majority of the survey respondents were relatively young: over 70% were under the age of 44, out of these about 40% were between 25 and 34. The largest portion of the survey respondents were women aged 25-34: they represented approximately one quarter of all respondents.

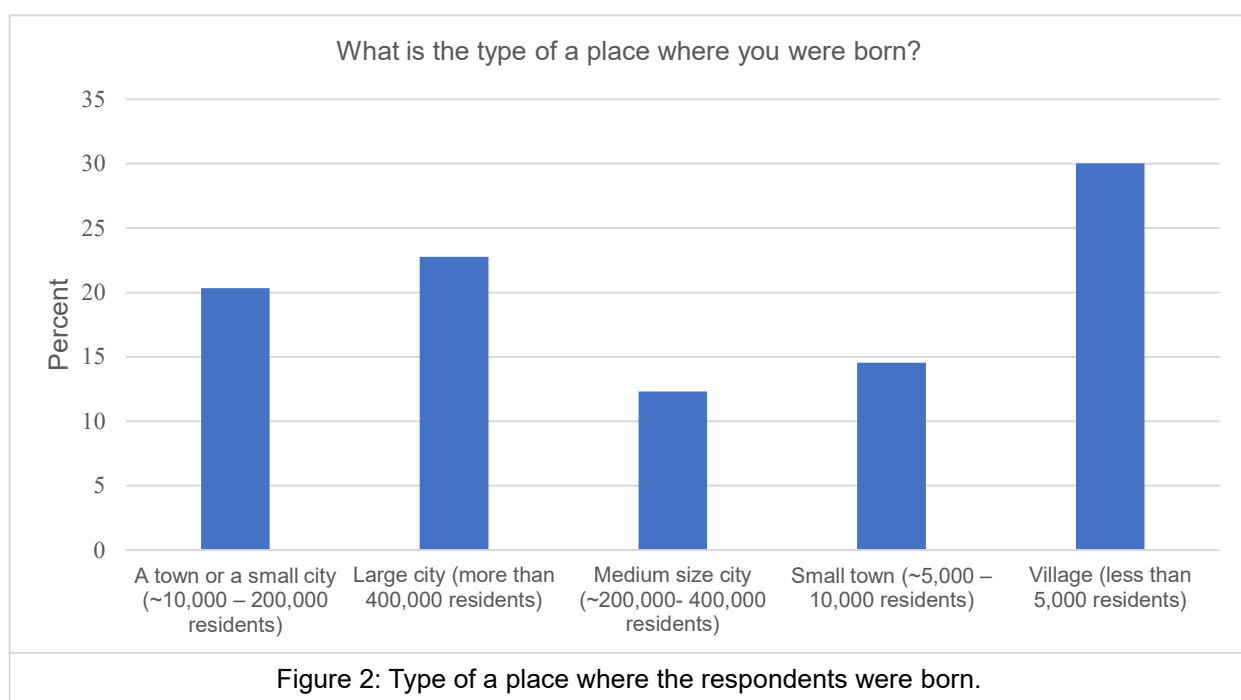


Although the Assessment tried to have a more equal representation of vets and VPPs, the majority of survey respondents were veterinarians (over 70 %). Similarly, the majority had a post-graduate degree: either a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) qualification or an equivalent (about 50 %), Masters degree (15 %) or PhD (5 %). The rest either had a Bachelors degree (12%), a technical

diploma/ certificate (13%), or a secondary/high school diploma (5%). Approximately equal numbers of men and women respondents had qualifications equivalent to VPP level.

To assess social background of the respondents, the survey asked questions about the place where the respondents were born and education of their parents. Interestingly, although the respondents had overall high levels of educational attainment, their parents did not have such an advantageous start. Almost 60% of the respondents indicated that their parents did not have a graduate degree. Only about 27% suggested that at least one of their parents had a Bachelors degree. And only 16% come from a family where at least one parent had a post-graduate degree.

About two-thirds of the respondents were born in smaller settlements, out of these one third were born in villages. Only about one-third of the respondents were born either in large or medium-size cities. However, at the time of the survey, over of a half of the respondents worked in large or medium-size cities. Slightly less than half worked in either small towns or villages. Women were more likely to work in large cities than men.

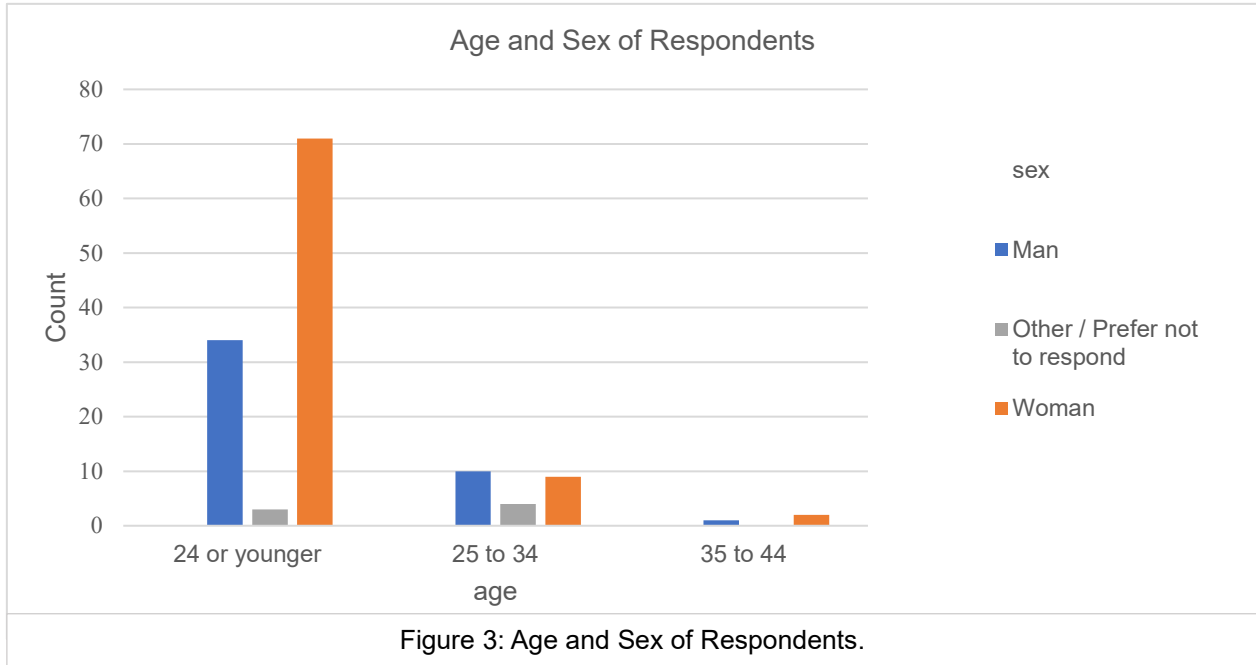


Nearly 70% of respondents worked for governmental organisations. Out of these, about 40% were from district, provincial or local level, and about 30% were from national level authorities. The other 30% of respondents come from a variety of professional settings, including private animal health facilities, industry organisations, academic institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international organisations. Professional levels had a good mix: 29% were at the entry-level positions, 38% were mid-level, 23% were senior level and about 10% were top-level positions.

Pre-service professionals

A total of 134 students answered the survey for this assessment. Of these, 61% were women, 34% - men, and 5% selected “other/prefer not to answer”. All countries that have national Veterinary Education Establishments (VEEs) were represented, except Lao PDR; some countries had stronger response rates than the others. It is possible that students from this country had problems with accessing Internet or understanding English which prevented them from

participation. The majority of respondents, 80%, were age 24 or younger; 17% were between 25 and 34, and only 3% were between 35 and 44. Most of the respondents, 78%, were working to obtain DVM qualifications. The survey reached a good mix of levels, from the first to the sixth year of studies. Social background of the surveyed pre-service professionals was somewhat similar to those of in-service. Almost half of the respondents come from families where none of the parents obtained a post-secondary degree; about 40% had parents who completed a Bachelor’s degree; the remaining proportion had either DVM qualifications or post-graduate degree. A little under 40% of student respondents come from rural areas: small towns and villages. Out of those who come from urban areas, 11% come from large cities.



Assessment Findings and Discussion

Gender composition of the veterinary sector

The trend reported in 2015 – growing numbers of women veterinarians – continues in South-East Asia. Currently, women animal health professionals outnumber men in four countries that participated in this research, they are equal or close to equal in three countries. Out of twelve countries participating in this Assessment, only Cambodia, PNG and Timor-Leste have 30% or less women vets in public sectors. In Brunei, there are over 55% of women vets in the private sector; in Myanmar, 56% of national-level veterinary officers are women; in Singapore the proportion of women vets and VPPs in the public sector is close to 70% (Table 2).

A regional trend that emerged recently is women occupying high-level leadership positions in the veterinary services. For example, in 2022, Dr. Akma Binti Ngah Hamid became the first woman Director General of Veterinary Services, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry in Malaysia. Dr. Vilayphone Vorrachim retired in March 2023 from the Director General position of the Department of Livestock and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of Lao PDR. Yet, the instances of women’s representation at the political level are rather exceptional. If we take into account only Director General or Deputy Director General positions (or their equivalents) in

the twelve countries participating in this research, the proportion of women is about 18% (please see Annex 8 for details). As of March 2023, out of twelve countries, four had WOAHS delegates who were women (Table 3).

As we go down from the top level, the proportion of women in management increases. In Indonesia, there are 12 upper-middle level management positions in the Directorate General of Livestock and Animal Health Services (DGLAHS), out of which three are currently women (one quarter). In Singapore, 64% of senior level managers are women. Depending on a country, the highest ratio of women in the veterinary services can be observed in the middle- (e.g. heads of units and coordinators of services) and upper-middle level (e.g., heads of divisions) positions.

There are fewer women in the positions that require training emphasising physical skills and working in remote areas. For example, in Cambodia, women represent 30% of veterinary staff working at the national level, 18% of staff in the provinces and only 7.8% of Village Animal Health Workers (VAHWs). In Myanmar, while women constitute 56% of vets working on the national level, there are less than 40% of women vets in provinces (see Table 2). Men are still primary incumbents of jobs that require long distance travel or living in remote areas.

Table 2: Gender composition of veterinary services in SEA countries, PNG and Timor-Leste				
Country/Position	Men	Women	Total	Percentage of women
Brunei⁵				
Public sector vets	4	3	7	42%
Public sector VPPs	46	24	70	34%
Private sector vets	23	29	52	56%
Cambodia: General Directorate of Animal Health and Production (GDAHP)⁶				
Public sector - National level (GDAHP):	200	89	289	30%
Public sector - Provinces:	382	84	466	18%
Village Animal Health Worker ⁷	8,540	722	9,262	7.8%
Indonesia: Directorate General of Livestock and Animal Health Services (DGLAHS), Ministry of Agriculture⁸				
DGLAHS staff overall	195	193	388	50%
DGLAHS management positions	50	41	91	45%
Lao PDR: Department of Livestock and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry⁹				
public sector vets – national level	*	*	129	>40%
Malaysia¹⁰				
Public sector vets	107	281	388	72%
Private sector vets	692	1,126	1,818	61%
VPP- Malaysia Veterinary Certificate course (2020-2022) ¹¹	58	51	109	47%
VPP - Malaysia Skills Certificate (2020-2022)	157	97	254	38%

⁵ Provided by a staff member of Livestock Industry and Veterinary Services Division, Department of Agriculture and Agrifood, Brunei, via email correspondence (received on 7 May, 2023)

⁶ Data provided by a staff member of the General Directorate of Animal Health and Production (GDAHP), Cambodia, via email (received on 21 April 2023)

⁷ Village Animal Health Worker (VAHW) were established in Cambodia by GDAHP, Cambodia, around 1999 and are provided with refreshment training by GDAHP annually.

⁸ Data provided by an Indonesian DGLAHS staff member in email correspondence (received on 13 March 2023).

⁹ Based on interview with a staff member of the Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR, conducted on 20 March 2023.

¹⁰ Provided by a staff member of the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) Malaysia via email (received on 2 May 2023)

¹¹ Provided by a staff member of the Veterinary Institute Malaysia via email correspondence (received on 21 March 2023)

Myanmar: Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation ¹²				
Public sector vets – national level (headquarters)	62	79	141	56%
Public sector vets – provincial level (in 15 provinces)	328	210	538	39%
Papua New Guinea ¹³				
Public service vets	3	1	4	25%
Public service VPPs	12	2	14	14%
Singapore ¹⁴				
Public sector vets	10	21	31	68%
Public sector VPPs	6	3	9	67%
Women in leadership positions in National Parks Board	4	7	11	64%
Private and academia/training veterinarians (licenced)	**	**	442	
Thailand ¹⁵				
Licensed vets	6,795	5,982	12,777	47%
Licensed VPPs	407	118	525	22%
Timor-Leste ¹⁶				
Public sector vets	53	19	71	27%
Private sector vets	2	0	2	0%
Vietnam: Department of Animal Health, Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development ¹⁷				
Public sector vets	209	138	347	40%

Table 3: WOAHA Delegates in the countries of Assessment, by gender		
	Country	WOAHA Delegate
1	Brunei	woman
2	Cambodia	man
3	Indonesia	man
4	Lao PDR	woman ¹⁸
5	Malaysia	woman
6	Myanmar	man
7	PNG	man
8	Philippines	man
9	Singapore	man
10	Thailand	man
11	Timor-Leste	woman
12	Vietnam	man
total men		8
total women		4

¹² Provided by the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, Myanmar (received on 20 March 2023)

¹³ Provided by a staff member of the National Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Authority, PNG, via email (received on 19 April 2023)

¹⁴ Provided by the National Parks Board, Singapore, via email correspondence (received on 8 March 2023)

¹⁵ Provided by the Veterinary Council of Thailand (VCT) by email on 24 May 2023

¹⁶ Provided by a staff member of the Veterinary Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Timor-Leste, via email (received on 20 April 2023)

¹⁷ Provided by a staff member of the Department of Animal Health, Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development, Vietnam, via email (received on 21 May 2023)

¹⁸ Retired in March 2023, and to be replaced.

Main messages:

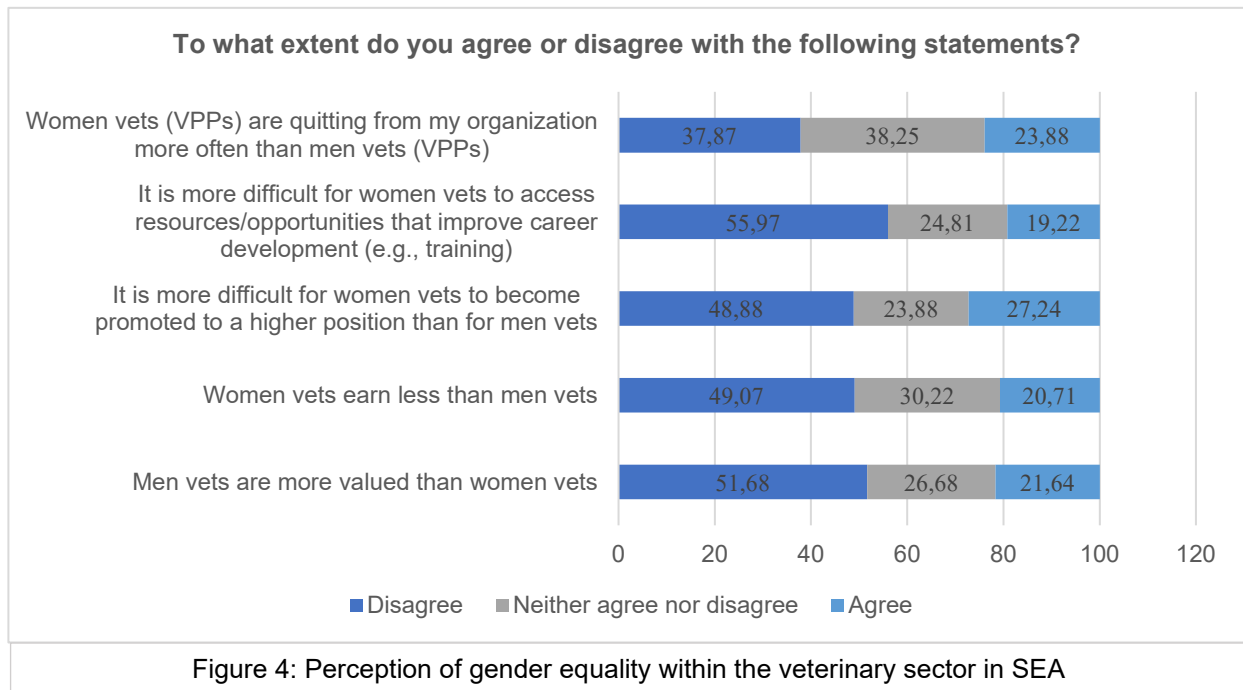
- *As noted in 2015, veterinary professions continue to feminise in South-East Asia.*
- *In some instances, women occupy top-tier positions (there were none reported in 2015).*
- *Men occupy most of the positions that emphasise physical work in remote areas.*

Perception of Gender Equality within the Sector

With numbers of women continuously growing within the profession, including within the middle-level management, there seems to be an overall perception of good levels of gender equality in the veterinary field among in-service survey respondents. Although this perception may be challenged by other findings of this research, this section will discuss the views of survey participants. Most of interview respondents suggested that career progression in their countries depends on individual qualifications rather than on gender. They also pointed out that in the government, everybody gets promotion and salary increase regardless of gender.

The survey conducted among in-service professionals offered five statements that all expressed the idea that women were in a less advantaged position within the veterinary profession compared to men. The statements were the following:

- Men vets are more valued than women vets;
- Women vets earn less than men vets;
- It is more difficult for women vets to be promoted than for men vets
- It is more difficult for women vets to access resources/opportunities that improve career development (e.g. training)
- Women vets (VPPs) are quitting from my organisation more often than men vets (VPPs)



Overall, the respondents tend to disagree that women vets and VPPs are disadvantaged compared to men. The only statement that was more doubted was “Women vets (VPPs) are

quitting from my organisation more often than men vets (VPPs)". Out of the remaining four statements, more people tend to agree with the statement "It is more difficult for women vets to become promoted to higher positions than for men vets". Figure 4 presents combined answers for "Strongly disagree" / "Somewhat disagree" and "Strongly agree" / "Somewhat agree". (To see the full distribution of answers please refer to Annex 3, Q23.)

Figure 4 reflects personal experiences and beliefs of the respondents. It is important to contextualise the judgements that people made within this survey. About half of the respondents were men who may be less aware of the realities that women face. In addition, large proportion of respondents had relatively advantaged background (e.g., completed post-graduate education) and worked in the government, which could have determined the higher levels of equality that they encounter in professional settings. The level of seniority of the respondents also matters: many women in senior level positions with whom we had an in-depth discussion said that they are not experiencing any discrimination, maybe because of their professional reputation.

The responses may also flag the lack of awareness regarding subtle ways of gender discrimination in the workplace. A study conducted in the UK showed that those managers who believed that women no are longer impacted by gender discrimination, tended to demonstrate discriminatory behavior towards women in the experimental part of the research (Begeny and Ryan, 2018).

Main messages:

- *The majority of respondents believed that women are not impacted by gender inequality within the veterinary sector in their countries; however, respondents also provided examples of how gender did affect them. The factors that could have affected respondents' views are: specifics of the sample group, potential low awareness of inequality. Additional research could be helpful to understand these views in more nuance.*

Women's Journeys Within the Veterinary Profession

Education

A Research conducted by UNESCO in 2005, recognized growing enrollment rates in post-secondary institutions in the South-East Asian region as higher education became more accessible to various social groups. One of the enabling factors was diversification of higher education providers. For example, in 2018 in Malaysia there were 150 public higher education institutions and 450 private ones (UNESCO, 2021). The government of Malaysia supports high-performing students from disadvantaged backgrounds with a low-interest student loan, which needs to be repaid after graduation. In Malaysia and other countries there are governmental scholarships, educational supplements, and other types of financial support available to students.

"I am what you call "a village kid". [...] I didn't get a scholarship, but I got a student loan. I had to repay in 8 years, but I repaid it faster when I started working" (Interview respondent, a woman, Malaysia)

The entry barrier for veterinary schools is high in South-East Asian countries. One must have high grades to be accepted, and girls are rising up to this challenge. All interviewees underlined that currently vet school student bodies are dominated by women. As suggested by interviewed academics, in Thailand, for example, up to 70% of current vet students are women. In some countries where the veterinary profession is still primarily occupied by men, the shift can be already observed within the education system:

"In Cambodia, men are dominating in all fields, but we can also see progress. For example, when I graduated from the Royal University of Agriculture, there were, maybe, less than

10% of women in animal production. But now, in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine there are up to 35% of women” (Interview respondent, faculty member of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, RUA, Cambodia)

Although, as discussed above, financial support is available for students with less advantaged backgrounds, post-secondary education is not free in most countries within the region, and there can still be significant barriers for certain groups. In particular, UNESCO suggests that ethnical minorities and Indigenous populations of South-East Asian countries may have less access to higher education (UNESCO, 2021). Several countries participating in this Assessment don't have their own veterinary school, including Brunei, PNG, Singapore, and Timor-Leste. To obtain education in the animal health field, people from these countries need to study abroad, which makes it even less accessible for many. Scholarships are distributed through highly competitive processes:

“I received a scholarship from the government to study in Scotland. For the year when I applied, only three government scholarships were available for the veterinary education” (Interview respondent, a woman, Singapore)

Another caveat of studying in Western countries is less practical knowledge of diseases that are more relevant for South-East Asia:

“With the younger vets who come from Australia, from the UK...When they come in, they're not used to tropical diseases. Tropical diseases are covered much less in their curricula, and most likely they only saw pictures in textbooks. Whereas if you study in the region, you will probably see it right there” (Interview respondent, a woman, Brunei)

Interviewees and survey respondents from PNG pointed out that in the absence of national vet schools, the country mainly relies on expatriate vets. They also pointed out that there is a big gap in salaries and other opportunities between expatriate and vets from the country.

“Why we don't have a lot of [local] vets in PNG? I think it's the opportunity to study, because we don't have a vet school in PNG, the only way you can study is overseas. And before there wasn't any scholarships available. And then, I guess, there was, but it wasn't made known to the public. So, the way I found out about it – I was asking a lot of questions. And because I really wanted to go, I made sure I was talking to the right people. And then, finally, I went to study under a scholarship” (Interview respondent, a woman, PNG)

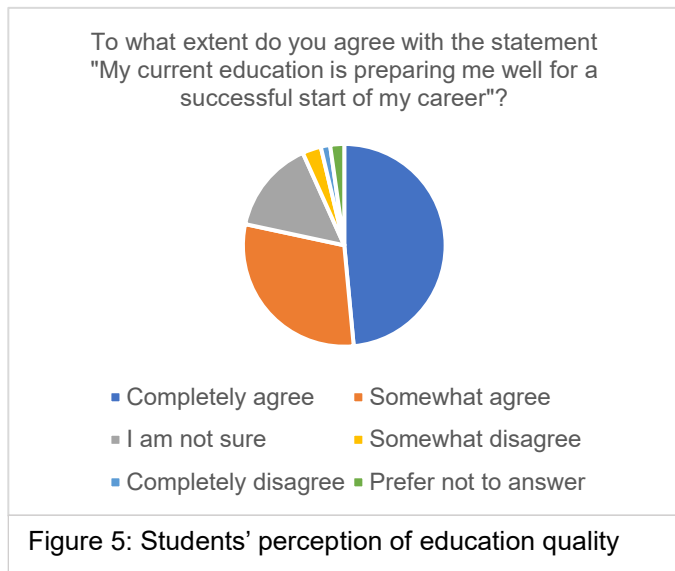
In some countries, when a family has limited resources for education, there is still preference towards sponsoring boys. At the same time, the experience of our interviewees demonstrates how important family support is for women's progress:

“I had the opportunity to study in Indonesia, through the Indonesian government scholarship. I was the first Timorese female vet graduate. [...] It is in the culture that when there is money to support only one, the family will support a son rather than a daughter. [...] I am brave because of my family, which is quite unique. I also have a brother, but my father said, no, she is the first one. My father is just a truck driver, but he made sure that I will study from elementary school to the University. He gave me the confidence” (Interview respondent, a woman, Timor-Leste).

The survey conducted among students shows high levels of satisfaction with the education within this region. Almost 80% of respondents agreed with the statement "My current education is preparing me well for a successful start of my career", 15% were not sure, and less than 4% disagreed (Fig.5).

However, when asked if any improvements were necessary for their educational programme and if yes, what those were (respondents could check all that applies), only 7% of respondents suggested that no improvements are necessary. One third of respondents wanted to see wider range of topics, 43% wanted to have more internship opportunities, and almost 80% suggested that more practical/hands-on training/field experience is needed. The comments also underline the demand for more practically oriented education, as suggested by the following quotes:

- I think that we should have internships in some large farm (pre-service survey respondent, a woman, Cambodia)
- Assessing students should not be based solely on written outputs and written exams (pre-service survey respondent, a woman, Philippines)



Several comments stressed the need for improvement of facilities and lab equipment.

When asked, if they have ever experienced being treated differently during education or field placements because of their gender (by professors, other students, supervisors, clients), over a half of all students (53%) responded negatively. One quarter respondent "yes", 19% were not sure and 2% preferred not to answer. In numbers, more women students reported experiencing different treatment because of gender; however, in terms of proportions within the same gender group, a bigger proportion of men students were reporting it (33% of all men students vs. 22% of all women students.) (Please see details in Annex 5, Q17.) Substantive comments to this question were provided by 26 respondents. Five students provided positive examples noting that their educational institution is valuing inclusivity and gender equality. The remaining 21 respondents provided negative examples mainly of situations related to treating large animals and general preference of lecturers towards men.

The survey also asked the students: "Does your University/Institution/Department include gender equity and equality as a topic in any of the courses, or does it have a separate course on gender?" Positive answer was given by 42% of respondents, 28% answered negatively, 27% were not sure, and 3% preferred not to answer (please see Annex 5, Q22). Several respondents from the Philippines reported that there was a one-time seminar on gender during their first year of studies. Overall, it seems that current students are not receiving adequate preparation to address gender within their professions, including, for example, dealing with women farm workers or addressing women's role in preventing zoonotic diseases.

Main messages:

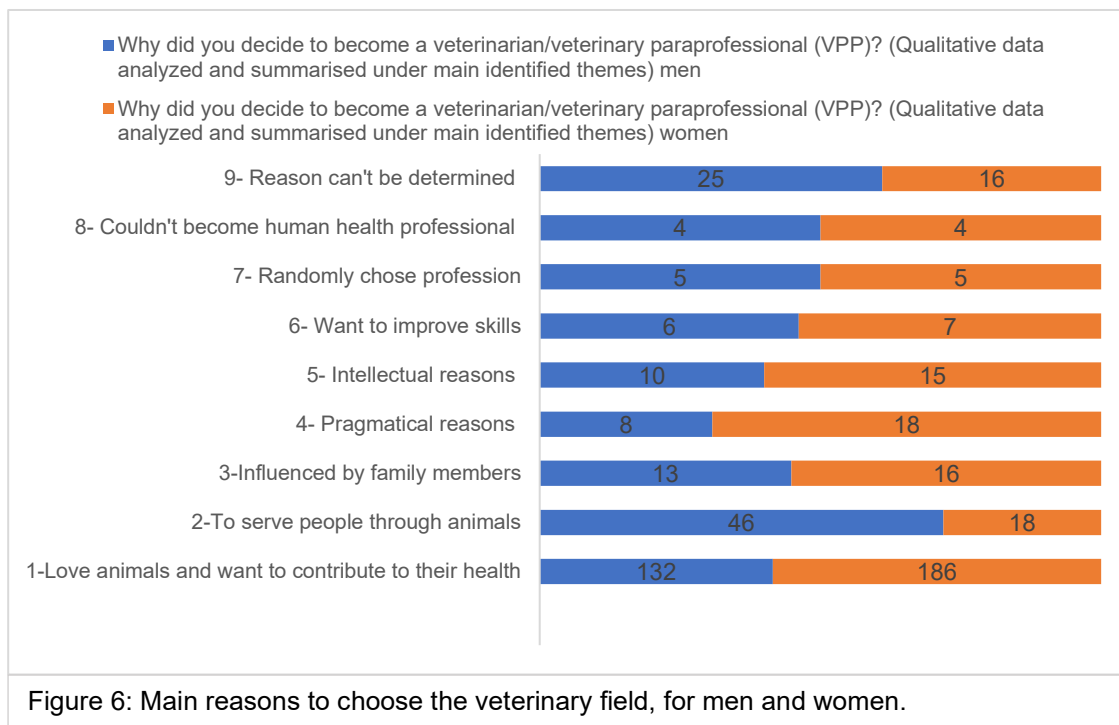
- *The trend, reported in 2015, continues: women vet students outnumber men.*
- *Despite the availability of governmental support for higher education, veterinary education may be inaccessible for women from less advantaged groups, especially from the countries that don't have their own VEEs.*
- *The majority of surveyed students expressed satisfaction with how their programs are preparing them for work; however, 80% wanted to have more hands-on learning.*

- One quarter of surveyed students report experiencing different treatment because of their gender.
- Veterinary students may not be receiving adequate preparation to address gender considerations within their profession.

Early career

Reasons to choose the veterinary field

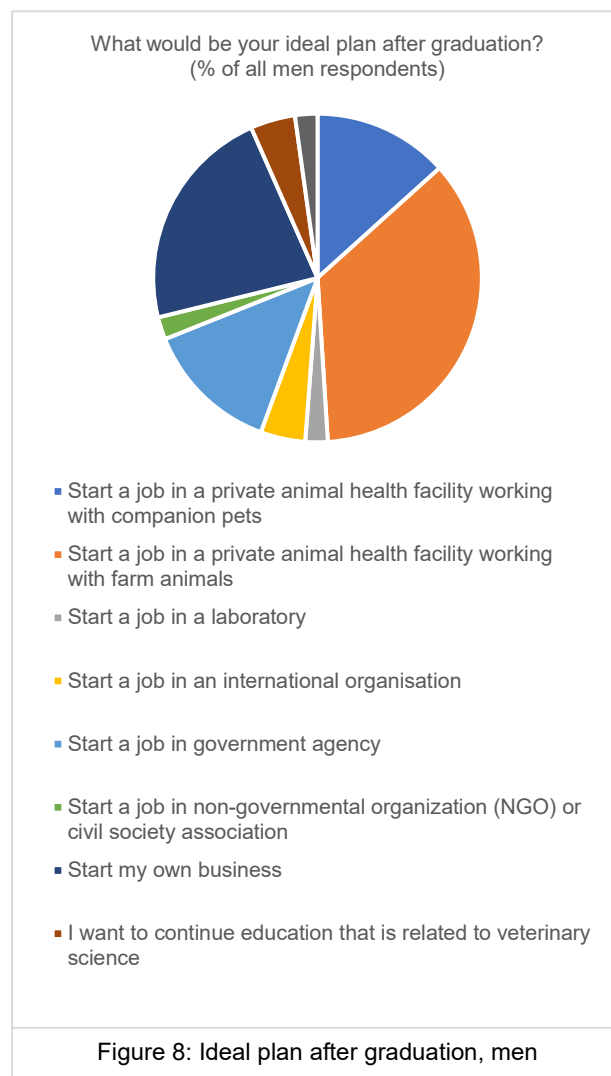
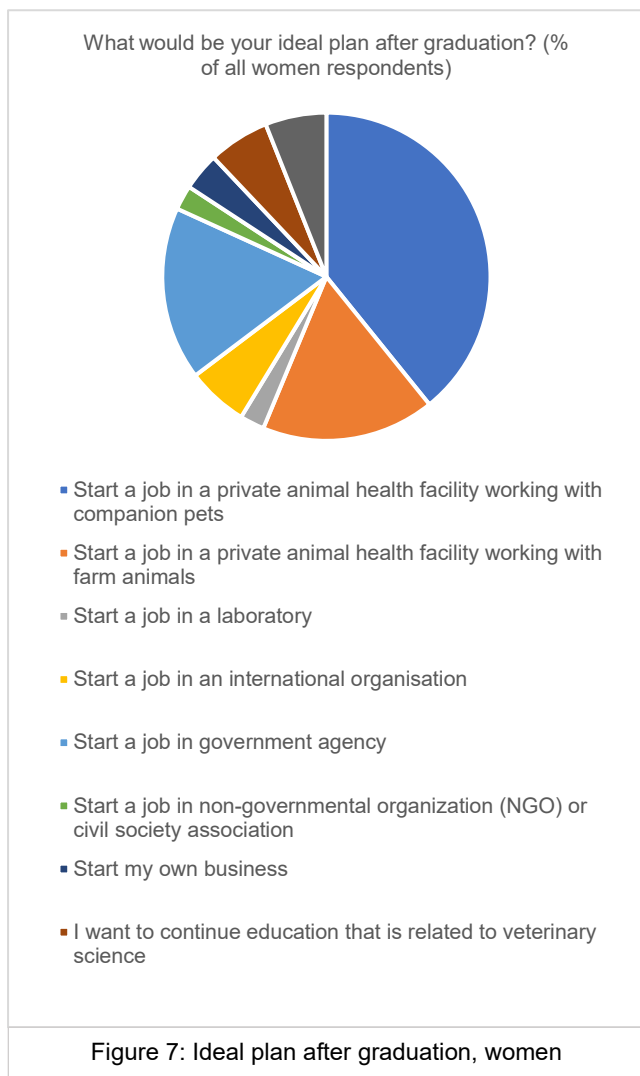
The survey had an open-ended question: “Why did you decide to become a veterinarian/ veterinary paraprofessional (VPP)?” The qualitative answers were analysed and grouped under the major emerging themes. The overwhelming majority of respondents, about 60% (Fig.6), brought up love for animals and wanting to contribute to their health. As one of the respondents put it: “Becoming a veterinarian has been my dream and passion since childhood”. Women tended to respond along this theme more often than men.



The remaining 40% of respondents brought up diverse themes. Among them, the biggest group were people who brought up One Health aspects – those who wanted in one or another way contribute to the health of people by addressing animal health. Topics under this theme included addressing zoonotic diseases, improving food security, and helping farmers, particularly, on small farms. Interestingly, such reasons were brought up by men respondents more often than by women. Women brought up pragmatic reasons more often than men (e.g., “easy to find job”, “stability”, “financial gains”, “gives me independence”) and reasons related to intellectual realm (e.g., “I had highest grades in school”, “I wanted to become a researcher”). Only a slightly bigger proportion of women compared to men said that they were influenced by parents or some other relatives. Specific comments showed different levels of agency: some women and men were inspired by the example of their family members, also veterinarians, or chose to be vets to contribute to family businesses. Overall, women demonstrated high levels of personal agency in choosing the veterinarian career path. (Please find full numbers in Annex 4, Q15).

Ideal work scenario

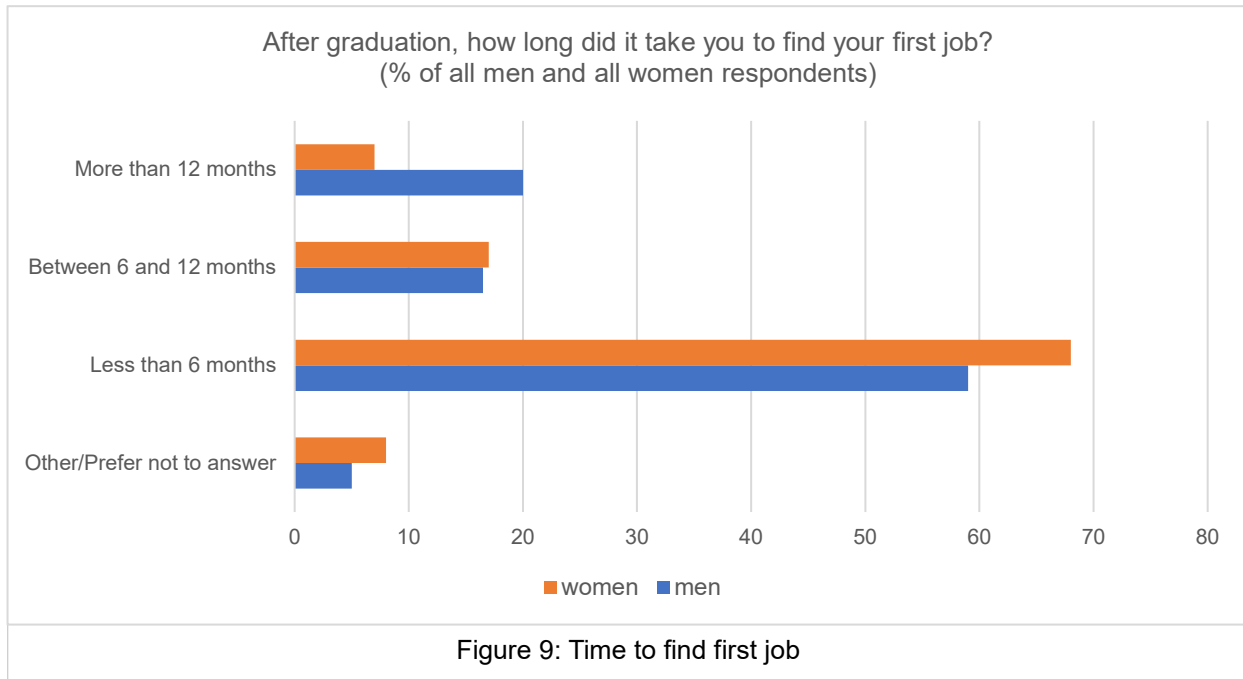
Students, participating in the survey, were asked “what would be your ideal plan after graduation”? Respondents were given multiple choices and they could select only one answer. Only one respondent stated that they were not planning to work in the veterinary profession. For women, most popular answers were “Start a job in a private animal health facility working with companion



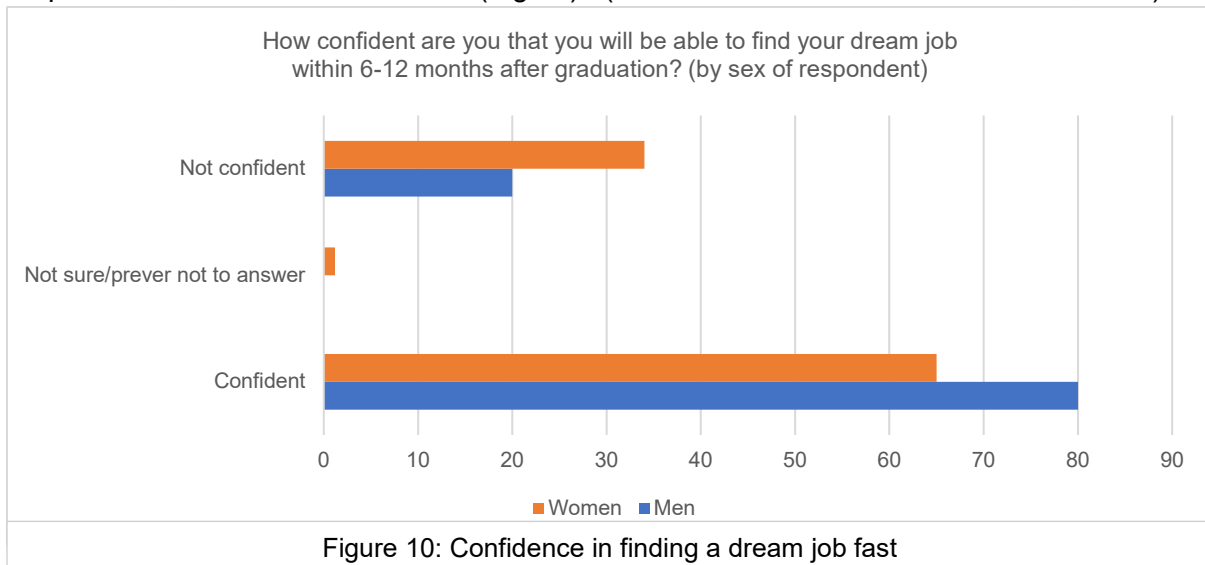
pets” (39% of all women respondents). However, the second most popular answer for women is shared between two options: “Start a job in government agency” (17%) and “Start a job in a private animal health facility working with farm animals” (17%) (Fig. 7). This data might be indicating that women’s interest and potential for working on farms may be underestimated. Among men respondents, the two most popular answers were “Start a job in a private animal health facility working with farm animals” (36% of all men respondents) and “Start my own business” (22%) (Fig. 8). (Additionally, please see Annex 5, Q16.)

First jobs

More women vets and VPPs find their first job quickly: almost 70% of all women respondents found the first job in less than six months after graduating (compared with about 60% of all men respondents). In addition, a smaller portion of women take more than a year to find their first job (7% of women compared with almost 20% of men) (Fig.9). Several women shared in interviews that they had been offered a job even prior to graduation. Survey respondents echoed these experiences.



However, young women feel significantly less confident about being able to find their preferred jobs within a short period compared to young men. The survey asked students: “How confident are you that you will be able to find your dream job within 6-12 months after graduation”? Out of all men respondents, 80% expressed confidence compared with 65% of all women respondents. Only 20% of all men respondents reported not being confident, while out of all women respondents, 34% are not confident (Fig.10). (Please see full numbers in Annex 5, Q14.)



In the beginning of their careers, younger women vets and VPPs experience discrimination because of the combination of their age and gender. It takes women graduates more time and efforts to gain reputation and respect, especially from clients, compared with men. When the survey respondents were given an opportunity to share the examples of different treatment within the professional environment on the basis of gender, the theme of compounding effect of age and gender came out prominently. The survey respondents provided the following comments:

- “Young female vets are sometimes treated with less credibility and respect by clients as they do to our male counterparts” (in-service survey respondent, woman, Singapore)
- “I’ve seen my nurses treat two new graduates differently purely based on their gender [...]” (in-service survey respondent, a woman, Singapore)
- “Since I’m a girl, some people who came for consultations won’t even glance at me. They just assume that I’m a secretary” (in-service survey respondent, a woman, Malaysia)

In an in-depth interview, a young woman compared working in an international company with working in a national company while being an early-career veterinarian:

“It is very different. Here [in the international company] I feel like everyone is on the same level. In this company, it is not hard for me to ask for advice when I am confused. Or if I make mistakes, they are very understanding. They help me and help each other. But in a national company, there is a gap. If they are in a high-level position, you are afraid to ask them.” (In-depth interview, woman, Indonesia)

Interview respondents pointed out the importance of having mentors during early career stages. One of the respondents, who is currently at a senior level governmental position, described herself as being lucky to meet people who supported her in building confidence as a young professional. One of such mentors, or role models, was a woman of her age, a student from the same cohort, who had more work experience.

“At the beginning, just after I graduated, I didn’t have that confidence level, especially in front of clients. But very fortunately, I always met with good people, who gave me good example and good advice. [They showed me how to] present myself in front of clients, how to control situation, when it comes to a challenge” (Interview respondent, a woman, Malaysia)

One of our interview respondents, who is a renowned veterinarian working in the private sector in Thailand, shared that younger women whom she trained and supervised would make sure to mention their teacher’s name while talking with their clients. In a way, they used the professional reputation of their mentor to gain the respect of clients faster. Mentorship opportunities, formal or informal, are playing significant role in helping young women vets and VPPs to cope with the challenges they face early in their careers.

“My manager is a kind person. She’s giving me the opportunity to enlarge my skills and knowledge. Not only about how to work with animal but also how to work with humans, how to communicate, be a leader. She also tolerates if I make a mistake and guides me to evaluate what I’ve done. She’s guiding me to become a better person” (Survey respondent, a woman, Indonesia).

“There is this programme within the government to identify potential managers or leaders. And I was part of that programme. So as part of that programme, I had a mentor. Every couple of months or so we would sit down together to discuss my experience and any areas that I would like to seek guidance on. I thought it was extremely helpful. They’ll pair you with somebody from a totally different branch of the government or somewhere else so that you will get a different perspective” (Interview respondent, a woman, Singapore).

Main messages:

- *More women tend to select the veterinary profession because of love for animals, pragmatic, financial and intellectual reasons, while more men brought up reasons related to the desire to contribute to human health and well-being.*
- *The ideal work scenario for the majority of current women students was working for private clinic dealing with small pets (39%); two second popular answers were working for a private company dealing with farm animals (17%) and working for the government (17%).*
- *More women vets and VPPs find their first jobs quickly compared to men; however, young women experience more discrimination in the onset of their careers because of compounding effects of age and gender. Having a mentor or a woman role model helps young women to overcome early-career challenges.*

Career progression

Changing workplaces

Our data shows that approximately the same proportion of men and women have experience of moving between organisations. About 30% of all surveyed women and 33% of all surveyed men said that they are currently in their first workplace; 23% of all women and 19% of all men changed their workplace once, 22% of women and 21% of men changed organisations twice, 19% of women and 20% of men changed jobs three or more times. It seems that these proportions are determined by the age of respondents more than by their gender (the sampled group was relatively young: 70% were under the age of 44). (Please refer to the table in the Annex 3, Q14.) The survey asked the respondents: “Why did you choose your current workplace?” This question was open-ended to enable the respondents to share what really matters to them without influencing their responses. The analysis identified nine key recurring themes (Fig.11).

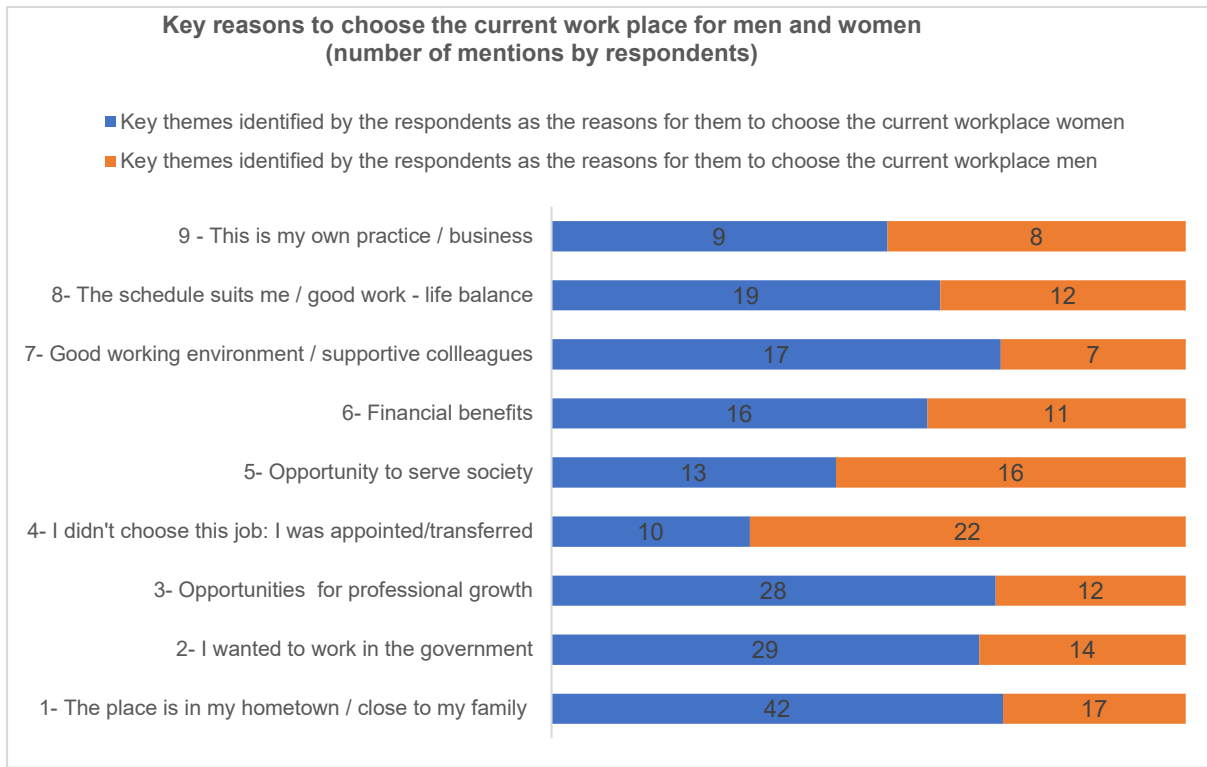


Figure 11: Key reasons to choose the current workplace

The most popular reason cited by respondents was being placed in one’s hometown or being close to one’s family (mentioned 59 times). This reason was overwhelmingly important for women (mentioned 42 times), but it was also an important one for men (mentioned 17 times). The second leading reason was the opportunity to work for the government (mentioned 43 times overall, out of which 29 times by women and 14 by men). It also seems to be one of the leading reasons for women: women respondents brought up this reason twice as many times compared to men. Government positions may be attractive for women mainly because of the stability they offer, as suggested by interview respondents. The opportunity for professional growth and developing new skills was twice as important for women as it was for men. Another important reason for women was good working environment. Men in our sample group were more likely to respond that the current workplace wasn’t their choice: it was an appointment. Men were also more likely to respond by saying that they chose the current job because it gave them more opportunities to serve community or society in general. Despite the expectations, such reasons as “financial benefits”, “good work-life balance”, “this is my own practice” were mentioned by both genders almost equal number of times. (Please find full table in Annex 4, Q15).

Being promoted

The survey asked in-service professionals: “How many times you were promoted in your current organisation (got a higher-ranking position)”? A slightly smaller proportion of men indicated that they were never promoted in their current organisation: 18% of all men respondents compared to 20% of all women respondents (Fig.12). Although these percentages may be related to the fact that about one third of our respondents were in their first working place after graduation, a larger part of men respondents said that they were in their first job places (33% of men vs 30% of women respondents) – yet fewer men are still waiting to be promoted for the first time.

If we compare the respondents who were promoted at least once, there seems to be difference between men and women. Out of all surveyed men, 22% were promoted three times or more, while the proportion of all surveyed women who were promoted three or more times is only 17%. Similarly, men who were promoted twice in their current organisation represent 20% of all men respondents, while the proportion of women who were promoted twice in their current organisation is 16%. The percentage of people who were promoted one time in their current organisation is higher for women (27%) than for men (24%). This data may be pointing out that women’s progression towards higher-ranking positions is slower than that of men. (See Annex 3, Q16.)

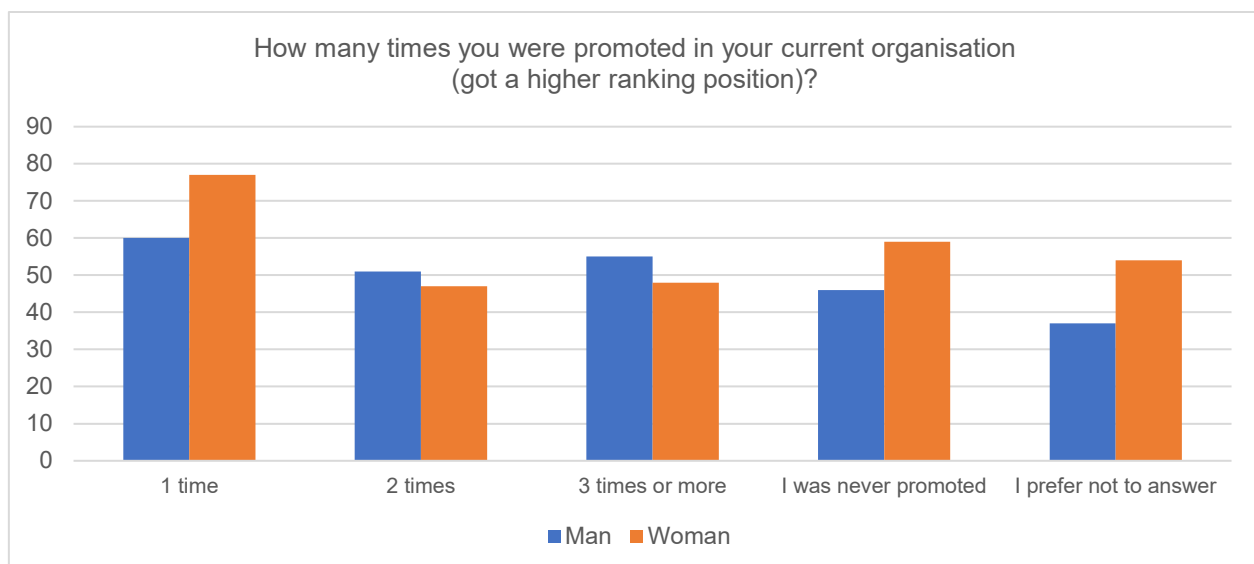


Figure 12: Promotion

The interview respondents did not feel that there is much gender difference in career advancement. Interviewees from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam said that in their countries, for the government employees to be promoted, they needed a certain level of education, professional background, to be in a position for certain number of years and to have a post opening to which one can be promoted. The interviewees believed that promotion is based on seniority of the person, and not on gender:

“If you ask me, there is no barrier. Just need to have experience, and, to be on a policy level, you need to have broad experience, both in Bangkok and in provinces” (interview respondent, a woman, Thailand)

“Our department has a policy on promoting women, but it also depends on your working experience. I was working for 10 years as the deputy township veterinary officer, and I had a PhD degree, and then I got promoted as a township veterinary officer.” (Interview respondent, a woman, Myanmar)

“I was in the government position for six years, and I got promoted twice. It was quite a fast progression. Honestly, I didn’t feel that I was discriminated” (Interview respondent, Singapore).

However, interviewees also pointed out to what could be the barriers for women to gain that level of experience and seniority that leads to promotion to higher levels. These barriers include women’s role as primary family caregiver and cultural norms suggesting that women should live close to their parents, especially younger women. Cultural beliefs regarding women in leadership positions, specific to Islamic societies, were also mentioned.

“We are now talking about capacity more than being a man or a woman, especially in the University. If you have a good degree and good capacity, you can be promoted. But sometimes for women it is more difficult if they are not single. They may work less effectively when they have families. Even in my Faculty, we have only one woman who is a full-time [employee]. We have several, who are contractors. They cannot work as efficiently due to family and, sometimes, health. They cannot stay longer hours” (Interview respondent, a woman, Cambodia).

“If you want to get promoted you have to demonstrate that you’re willing to work hard and to be contactable even after office hours to respond to important and urgent cases. But then, this is where it becomes difficult for women, especially women with children. Even in my country, which is, I would say, we are quite a progressive society, but there is still an expectation that women should be the primary care giver for their children. You can see the difference when it is already seven and the mothers are going to pick up kids from grandparents, but then the fathers can stay on, and continue with the meetings. But ultimately, it is about delivering the results, even for those with kids,” (Interview respondent, Singapore).

“For example, if I want to become the director of my Division, I need more time and experience with various responsibilities. If I keep the same position, I cannot become a director. I need to be trained for at least two-three other jobs. But my parents are here in Bangkok, so I don’t want to be transferred outside Bangkok metropolitan area. But if I want to be promoted, I need to be transferred somehow. This happens a lot to other people, especially young women, because they want to be close to parents and don’t want to be transferred” (interview respondent, a woman, Thailand)

“I have been here for 11 years. My boss has changed for a few times already, but I am still in this division. [...] Yes, about 10 years in normal for diploma holders, but not for veterinary

doctors. They get promoted in four-five years. The problem for us is that there are not enough higher positions for our level. [...] I am in the headquarters now, but in the rural area, paravets can become bosses, because there is shortage of people there” (interview respondent, a woman, Malaysia)

Salary increase and satisfaction

We asked the respondents how many times their salary had increased within their current organisation. The results are somewhat similar to the outcomes of the question about promotion: women’s salary progression stagnates somewhere in the middle. The proportion of people, whose salary was increased once is 20% of all women respondents and 13.7% of all men respondents. Men seem to experience salary increases more frequently: 15.7% of all men saw their salary increase twice (compared to 14.2% of all women), 45% of all men had a salary raise three or more times (compared to 40% of all women). In addition, more women (9%) never experienced any salary increase compared to men (6%) (Fig.13).



Figure 13: Salary increase

However, despite the fact that their income increased fewer times, women seem to be more satisfied with their revenue rates compared to men (Fig.14)

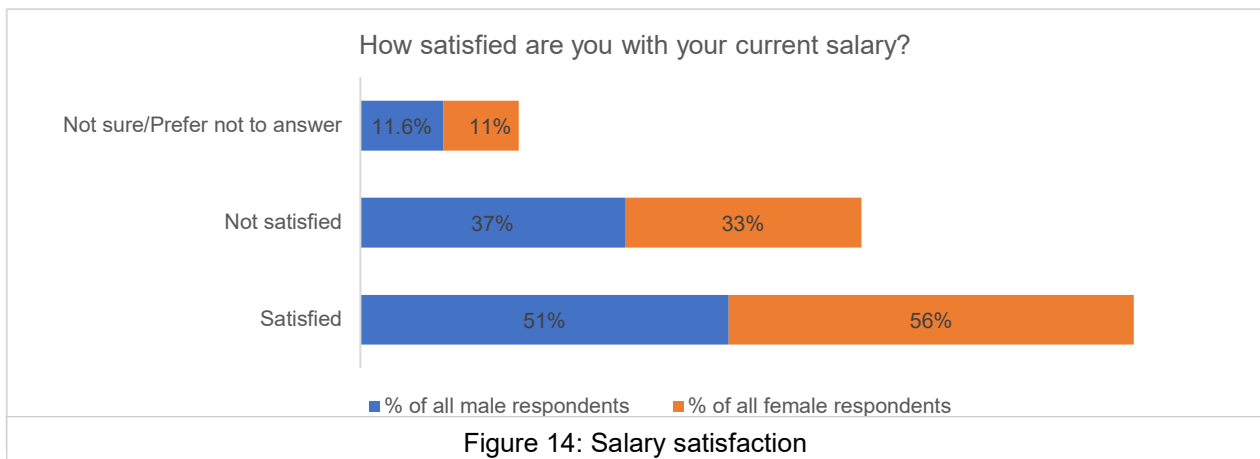


Figure 14: Salary satisfaction

Some survey-respondents' comments related to this topic were:

- "I was offered a low salary in my second job, possibly because I was too meek to demand higher" (in-service survey respondent, a woman, Singapore)
- "Difficult to obtain salary increase and poor promotion" (in-service survey respondent, a woman, Philippines)

Being treated differently because of gender

The survey respondents were asked if they were ever treated differently because of their gender. Overall, one fifth of the respondents answered "Yes", while approximately two thirds of respondents said "No". About 10% of the respondents were not sure, and 5% preferred not to answer. Women report experiencing gender-biased behaviors more frequently compared to men: 25% of all women respondents compared with 14% of all men respondents. In addition, the proportion of women who answered this question with a confident "no" was lower than that of men: 57% of all women compared to 72% of all men.

The survey also asked the respondents if they knew someone who had been treated differently because of their gender. Approximately the same proportion of people who reported experiencing it themselves also knew someone who has been treated differently because of their gender – about 20%. A slightly smaller portion of respondents answered "No" to this question compared to the previous one: 54%. About 20% of people were not sure, and 4.7% preferred not to answer.

Analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions that offered the respondents the opportunity to share the examples of differential treatment due to gender, provided the following themes:

- Facing a stereotype that women are less capable in general or in handling specific tasks (mentioned 26 times)
- Being discriminated by clients: the instances that were reported ranged from clients expressing their preference towards men vets to clients being rude and aggressive with women (mentioned 23 times)
- Being discriminated by managers (mentioned 9 times)
- Discrimination in relation to doing field work and going to farms (mentioned 13 times)
- Compounding effects of discrimination because of age and gender (mentioned 11 times)
- Having less access to certain opportunities (mentioned 10 times)
- Preference is given to men when hiring new staff (mentioned 7 times)

Other topics that were brought up include: being paid less than men, facing the stereotype that women are less suitable for leadership positions, being denied promotion because of being a woman, sexual harassment, being discriminated because of the intersections of race and gender, discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people. The topic of sexual harassment also came up in interviews in the contexts of educational field trips and working environment.

At the same time, significant number of comments offered evidence of experiencing gender equitable treatment (reported 17 times) or experiencing "positive" types of discrimination, for example when women are offered help with more difficult tasks, not assigned to work late hours, given priority in choosing which field station to go to (reported 6 times). Although such treatment is frequently viewed by people as positive, it often works to reinforce gender stereotypes.

Main messages:

- *Men and women have similar number of moves between organisations; about one third of both, men and women respondents were in their first workplace.*
- *The most popular reason to choose the current workplace was proximity to one's family; this was number one reason for women, and second most popular reason for men.*

- *Women appear to be facing stagnation in promotion and salary increase more often than men.*
- *One quarter of all surveyed women who are currently working reported being treated differently because of their gender; the reported instances vary from minor incidents to serious violations such as denying promotion, bullying by clients or sexual harassment.*

Women in Leadership Positions

There are now many women working in middle- and upper-middle level positions in the veterinary sector. In some countries, they are visibly outnumbering men. In addition, there are instances of women occupying high-level positions, such as Director-General and Deputy Director-General. This creates an overall impression that women have same opportunities within the sector. However, this Assessment demonstrates that after a certain level, women's career progression gets stagnated facing so-called "glass ceiling".

"I was never thinking about gender because there are more women in my office than men. So, I thought that we have same opportunity for our job. But for higher positions, still more men than women, like the Ministry-level positions. Like my director, I think she has great competencies, but I am not sure if there will be a consideration [for the Director General position] because she is a woman." (Interview, a woman, Indonesia)

Despite many highly qualifying women who demonstrated exceptional leadership skills, the stereotype that women can't be leaders is still persistent:

- "My superior told me before that I will never be the Director of our Bureau because I am a woman" (in-service professionals survey respondent, a woman, Philippines)
- "The leader rarely is a woman, almost all of them are men" (in-service professionals survey respondent, a woman, Vietnam)
- "Related to religious and traditional practice, male preferred over female for top management positions" (in-service professionals survey respondent, a woman, Malaysia)
- "Even though I am from a modern, developed country, I think that as an Asian society we are still very patriarchal, and that people tend to accord top positions to men rather than women. Many women do hold senior positions, but generally, the top tier still go to men" (in-service professionals survey, a woman, Singapore)

The major barriers that came out from the interview discussions and open-ended survey questions are:

- The expectation of longer working hours is interfering with the social norm that it is a woman's role to be the primary family caregiver.
- Higher pressure is put on women to prove their capacities compared with men.
- Cultural preferences towards men leaders.
- Women are often excluded (or choose to opt out) because of family duties from opportunities resulting in professional growth.
- There is very limited institutional support to assist women in balancing family responsibilities, while developing careers; there is also very limited encouragement to men to take up more family caregiving responsibilities.
- Women are often unable to participate in informal networking that is also necessary for promotion.

High-level positions come with a lot of responsibilities. People with leadership roles are expected to work longer hours, be available anytime in case of emergency situations, often sacrifice their weekends and holidays. Despite heavy workload, many women in senior-level positions, whom

we interviewed, were successfully balancing their leadership responsibilities with raising children. In almost all cases, this was thanks to their supportive families and communities, and very rarely due to the support from the employers. As discussed above, institutionalised policies that support women in balancing their roles in families with working responsibilities positively impact women's progress towards leadership positions.

Professional growth requires more hands-on experience, field trips, national and international training. Many women are able to make family arrangements to get such experience, however, many still find it difficult to handle without adequate institutional support. Some women are also excluded from such opportunities because of the assumption that it will be too difficult for them.

- “I was a breastfeeding mom and got discriminated because of it. They made me choose between one training or my baby, but cannot be both” (in-service survey respondent, a woman, Philippines)
- “A colleague was not promoted because she has a toddler and a newborn. [She was] told to concentrate on family first” (in-service survey respondent, a man, Philippines)

Many women make conscious decisions to prioritize their families, however, the idea that the family is their priority should not be generalised to all women. Women need to be able to choose if they want to participate in the field trips, trainings, and other professional opportunities, as well as be able to take up additional responsibilities. Flexible working arrangements, institutionalised as a policy, can help many women to progress in their careers, while managing families. Financial support for bringing children to work-related travels can significantly help women in balancing professional and personal lives and make them more productive at work. For example, some international conferences introduced Childcare / Dependant care grants for their delegates.

Unfortunately, there is evidence that what is “best” for women is often decided for them. For instance, several people in the survey suggested that the fact that women are not sent on field trips and not given difficult tasks is good for them as it helps to keep their work-life balance. Yet, it is also hampering career growth, as interviewed women explained. The field trips help to develop professional skills and support informal networking, which are both very important for career development. Interviewed women told that women are ready to make arrangements with their families in order to take up the opportunities.

“When we go to the field, we get some sort of a traveling allowance. And you know, the salaries of our animal health officers are not sufficient, so that does help when you are travelling to get some extra income. Also, travelling is an opportunity to train people, to have that experience and grow professionally. It is also informal chatting, establishing relationships, creating networks – all these opportunities you miss out when you are not included in the field trip” (Interview respondent, a woman, PNG)

“When I was still in a junior position, I had to perform the best of me. Once I had to teach outside our city, very far. I was seven months pregnant with my second one, and I took my older daughter with me. No help, only me and my kid. Sometimes my daughter would disturb the class. I was surprised how supportive were the participants, no one complained. I think because they saw that my belly is really big! [laughs]” (Interview respondent, woman, Indonesia)

Another issue is that participation in the informal events and networking opportunities is sometimes challenging for women:

“Because I am a woman and I need to take care of the house and children, I can't always participate in the social events, for example, on the weekends, or dinner parties. So, I miss the opportunities to promote myself, to meet more people. Men, they go out and have beer

with each other, and they can come home late” (Interview, a woman in a senior position, Vietnam)

The assumptions that women cannot work as much, as hard, or as well as men are holding women back more than the actual pressure of the work. About a half of interviewed women told us that their mistakes are scrutinised more than those of men, and when they underperform, it is attributed to their gender rather than a skill that could be developed. Under such pressure, many women decide not to run against the wind, but also many women face the challenge and work even harder to prove themselves:

“As a woman you have to perform higher. Because your mistakes are being looked at. And there is always a human factor. But if you make a mistake, people will say, oh, it’s because she is a woman, she doesn’t work well, right? That happened with me a lot.” (Interview, a woman, Indonesia)

Institutional enablers

Although work-life balance is of equal importance for men and women (as will be demonstrated below) institutional enabling factors that support women in implementing their roles as family care givers are particularly important for women’s career progression. Currently, most women address challenges by mobilising the support of their immediate and extended families. Rarely women talked about receiving support from their employers.

“I had to study in Australia for one year, in the US for two weeks, and in New Zealand for five months. When I am away, my former mother-in-law takes care of my son.” (Interview, a woman, Vietnam)

“Actually, it was pretty hard for me to have a career and a baby at the same time. Because, I think, my office at that moment gave me a lot of opportunities. They saw me as a competent person and they wanted me to do everything, to meet the deadlines. Even though I have a baby. And it is hard not to think about your children, if you are a mother.” (interview respondent, a woman, Indonesia)

“I wasn’t married at the time I joined my team, I got married afterwards, and my team was present at my wedding. And they saw me, their head, being pregnant and being in the field. We did an emergency preparedness. I did my best because of my team – they count on me. I ended up having seven children. And ultimately, I am also a wife. So, I need a very understanding spouse, and I need my children to understand as well that I can’t be there all the time.” (interview respondent, a woman, Brunei)

Whenever women talked about the support that they received from their offices, almost always it was due to personal good intentions of their colleagues and supervisors, but rarely as a result of an institutionalised policy. For example, one of the interview respondents shared a story of a woman who was in a senior position when she delivered a baby. The official maternity leave in that country is three months, however, this woman was able to take an additional 9-months of leave-without-a-pay. This situation was not typical, and it created stress for the department where she worked, as there was no replacement for her position while she was gone. But her supervisor and her colleagues supported her.

In Malaysia, there is a policy for government employees that helps women expand their parental leaves. As one of interview respondents explained, women can take 90 days of paid maternity leave and after that they can take up to three years of unpaid leave. The same position is not guaranteed for them, however, when they decide to return, the government will provide a job placement for them. In addition, as the same interviewee explained, in most Ministries there are

special childcare facilities where working women can drop off their small children before work and visit them for breastfeeding breaks during office hours if necessary.

“I think, all Ministries have such facilities. You know, not all offices will have such [childcare] facilities, but some do. When you are working in an urban area, they will provide such a facility. But in the villages, they will not have it.” (Interview respondent, a woman, Malaysia)

This institutional support may be among the enabling factors resulting in high participation of women in the veterinary labour force in Malaysia (over 70% of public sector vets in Malaysia are women). It may also be explaining why women tend to prefer working in the government and in urban areas. Even though some good examples exist, the institutional support is still very limited. In addition, the situation differs across countries of the region.

Main messages:

- *Women in the veterinary sector face a “glass ceiling”: it is difficult for them to raise beyond a certain level in professional hierarchy.*
- *The major constraints for women are:*
 - *higher pressure to prove their competencies compared to men,*
 - *expectation of even longer working hours at higher managerial levels,*
 - *cultural preferences towards men leaders,*
 - *limited institutional support enabling to utilize career growth opportunities,*
 - *less informal networking opportunities with decision makers.*
- *Institutional enabling factors that support women in implementing their role as family caregivers have positive impact on women’s career growth.*

Women on Farms

The 2015 report pointed out that women are disadvantaged in terms of working on the farms. In this study, conducted eight years later, both survey and interview respondents indicated that the stereotype that women are not suitable for working with livestock is still prevalent. For example, the survey respondents shared the following comments:

- When I visit villages to do investigation, farmers will doubt if I can treat large animals (an in-service survey respondent, a woman, Timor-Leste)
- When going to the field for sampling large animals, male workers are preferred over female workers (an in-service survey respondent, a woman, Indonesia)

Preferring men in the context of field/farm work was among the leading themes that came out as examples of gender-biased behavior in the in-service professionals’ survey. The interview respondents echoed this idea. Several interview respondents shared their observations that younger veterinarians prefer working in cities rather than going to farms. However, this is not supported by the evidence from our survey for pre-service professionals.

We asked current students: “How likely are you to apply for a job in a countryside / remote area after graduation?” Overall, 68% of respondents are likely to apply for a job in a countryside after graduation. Despite common belief that women don’t want to go to rural areas, 53 young women indicated readiness to work in a remote area after graduation. This represents nearly 65% of all women students, who responded to the survey (Fig.15). In addition, as discussed in a section above, 17% of women students selected working on a farm in a private company as their ideal work scenario upon graduation. This data shows that there may be an underestimation of the young women vets/VPPs interest in working with livestock.

In our interview discussion with a young woman completing a programme that will result in VPP qualifications, the interviewee shared that her plan is to work on a farm owned by her parents, but she is also considering applying to work with the government.

“If the government sends me to a remote place, I will love it. [...] In my honest opinion, it's already 2023, and women can do everything a man can. [...] Animals are quite easy if you know the technique. For instance, a cow, you can easily handle a cow by using the lasso rope. So, it's not only a man's job - a woman can do it too” (Interview respondent, a woman, Malaysia).

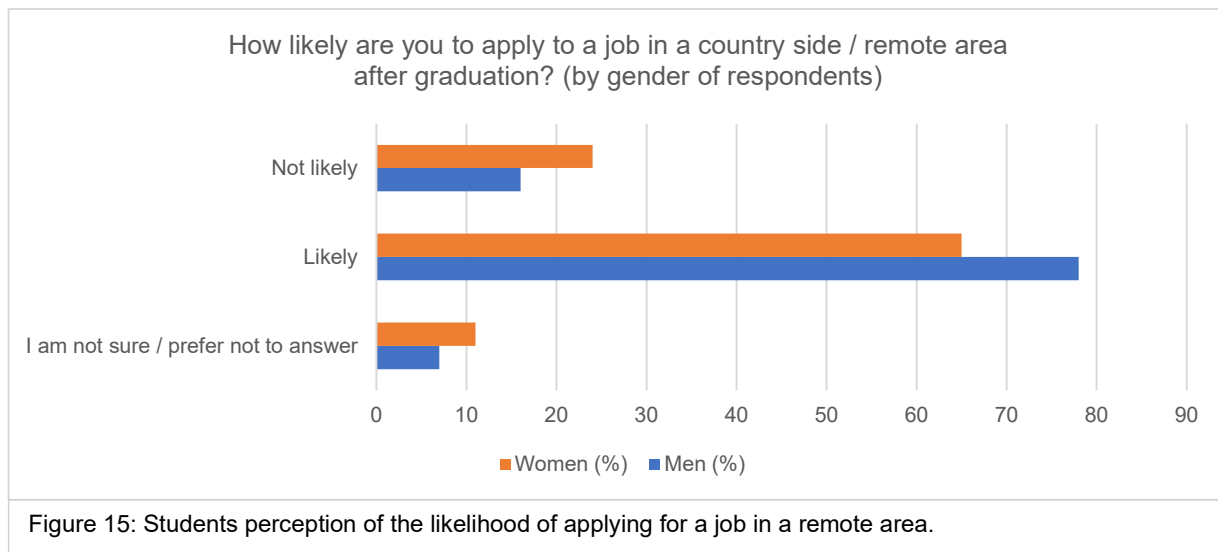


Figure 15: Students perception of the likelihood of applying for a job in a remote area.

Another interview respondent, a woman in a high-level government position and with experience working for an international organisation, shared her story of servicing villages earlier in her career:

“I would say, there is still a strong perception in Myanmar that women shouldn't be working with large animals. But I was in the field. Once I joined the government, I was in the field for seven years. And I was working with cattle, pigs, sheep – all types of farm animals. I was assigned to a very small village, and there was no transportation available. And I had to cover 52 villages! I travelled by bicycle, sometimes just walked. The people, they thought I was very different, because I am coming from a big city. And I am very small – just five feet tall. They were actually trying to protect me. The farmers were sometimes reluctant to have me as their farm vet. But you have to use techniques to restrain animals to protect yourself. Physical strength... of course, you need physical strength, but you know, for me it is not a problem even though I am small. You just need to use techniques to avoid injuries, and you will be fine.” (Interview respondent, a woman, Myanmar)

Interestingly, handling farms and field trips came out to be cited as the happiest professional experience for many working women participating in the survey. The survey asked an open-ended question: “What are the main joys of your current job?” 51 respondents (almost 10% of all surveyed in-service professionals) mentioned field trips, helping farmers, working with cattle. Out of them, 24 were men and 27 were women. For example, they said:

- “I enjoy working in the field and being able to help farmers” (an in-service survey respondent, a woman, Philippines)
- “I am happy to go to villages and give treatment for the animals there” (an in-service survey respondent, a woman, Myanmar)

It seems that many women enjoy and feel capable of working with large animals, being passionate about helping farmers. Yet, it also seems that many of them are discouraged from doing this type of work during education.

- “Female students are not encouraged to work in cow farms because they think it is a man’s job” (a pre-service survey respondent, a man, Cambodia)
- “I was treated a couple of times as less physically adequate because of my size as a student on farms. Hence, I avoided going into large animal practice” (an in-service survey respondent, a woman, Singapore).

Students from the SEA region pointed out that they encountered this stereotype in Australia: “In the rural context, on the farms, somehow less is expected from you, because you are perceived as less strong. And you know, we can handle a cow... But at the same time, I am wondering if this is also because I am an Asian person. Not just being a woman. Those things combined?” (Interview respondent, a student in Australia).

Women get systematically discouraged from learning how to handle livestock animals because of the assumption that they won’t do it in the future. During an interview, a Thai student explained that when the small groups are formed for field work, the instructors try to make sure that there is at least one man in each group. She thought that this was because of a belief that women students will not want to or won’t be able to work with large animals. Yet, young women from the SEA region often challenge this perception:

“During the fieldwork, we have to do blood sampling of a horse. So, he [the instructor] said, oh, please, let a man do this. It is like he's saying that girls can’t take blood sample from the horse because horses are big and very muscular. Then I told him that I want to try. And it only took me less than 30 seconds. I got it. He was surprised.” (Interview, young woman studying for a VPP-level certificate.)

If this stereotype is not addressed within the academic settings, in the future the industry may miss a substantive number of capable employees, while women will have less options for career development.

Another barrier for women to take up more jobs on farms and in rural areas is lack of family-oriented facilities. For example, one interview respondent shared that she preferred working on a farm at the beginning of her career, but once she started a family, she was looking for a place that had a proper daycare for small children.

The interview respondents also suggested strategies to make women’s engagement in farms safer and more productive, such as: going to farms in gender-mixed teams or together with other women, using the help of farmers, using modern technologies to instruct the farmers while visiting the farms only occasionally.

Several interview respondents indicated that the gender perceptions are starting to change. Interviewees from Malaysia suggested that there are now many women vets in their country and the farmers are much more used to seeing women. They show respect and often try to ensure better working conditions for women veterinarians. In some countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand women vets’ and VPPs’ work with livestock is already being normalized and welcomed by the farmers partially due to the development of the infrastructure and facilities in rural areas.

“I can feel that the farmers are recognizing female veterinarians. There are many very competent and highly recognised female veterinarians working with farms” (Interview respondent, a woman, Thailand).

Main messages:

- *There is a stereotype that women are not fit to work on farms.*
- *About 65% of all women student survey respondents indicated that they are likely to apply for a job in the countryside after graduation.*
- *Women get discouraged from working with farm animals during education.*
- *If the stereotype about women not being fit to work on farms is not addressed within the educational system, in the future the industry may miss a substantive number of capable employees, while women will have less options for career development.*

Work-life balance and Professional Burnout

Work-life balance

The survey suggested the following question: “Do you have any difficulties/challenges in balancing work and family/personal life?” Overall, there are more people who are struggling to maintain work-life balance (40% of all respondents) compared to those, who don't (37% of all respondents) (Fig.16). Contrary to what could have been expected, women do not report having work-life balance challenges more often than men. Within the same gender, proportion of people who reported having difficulties/challenges with maintaining satisfactory work-life balance was the same (Fig. 17).

It is the very nature of the veterinary profession that poses challenges to veterinarians and VPPs. Answering an open-ended survey question, the respondents depicted heavy workload and stress, work “spilling over” into personal time, the need to deal with emergencies and life-and-death situations. The analysis identified the most common themes that came out from the open-ended question. The list below summarises the themes that were mentioned by at least 2% of the total number of respondents (listed in the order of popularity, with #1 being the most popular theme):

- 1- Problems in drawing boundaries between work and personal/family life (including, not compensated overtime work, the need to bring work home, working on weekends and vacations);
- 2- Financial concerns: I am worried that I won't provide for my family (including the need to undertake additional jobs which takes up family/personal time);
- 3- I don't get enough time with my family;
- 4- My workplace place is far from where the family lives, and I have to be separated with them for long periods;
- 5- Challenges in raising children;

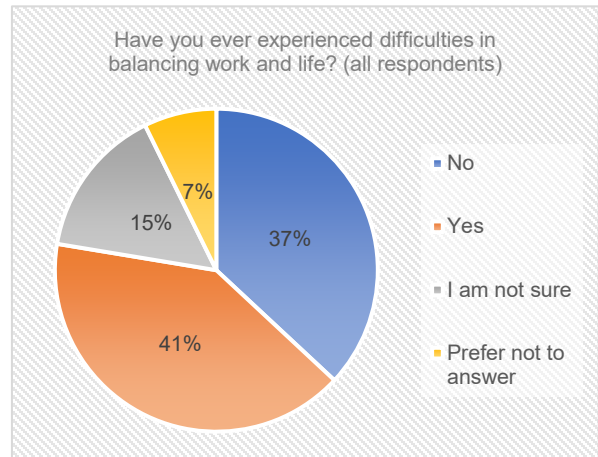


Figure 16: Experiencing difficulties in balancing work and life (all respondents)

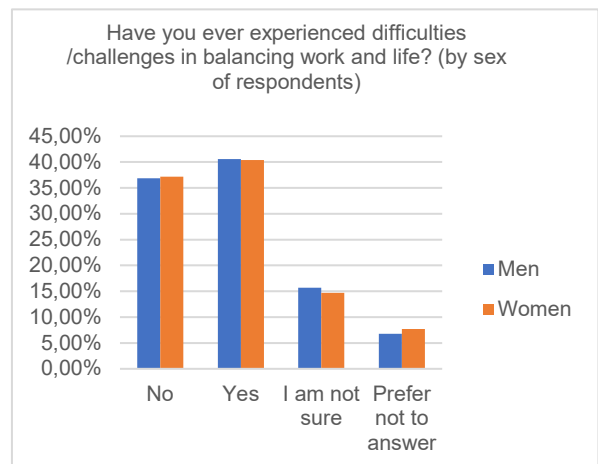


Figure 17: Experiencing difficulties in balancing work and life (by sex of respondents)

- 6- My workload is too big;
- 7- I don't have enough time for myself and to rest.

Women were twice as often to mention that the boundary between work and life gets infringed and they were the majority of those who mentioned the heavy workload without specifying that it takes up personal time. Men had more concerns about being able to provide for the family. Equal number of men and women brought up the topic of being separated from their families because of the remote duty station. In addition, men were also raising concerns that they would like to participate in upbringing of their children more than the work allows them. This data highlights that the need to be close to family and participate in family activities is often underestimated for men and should be addressed within the working environment.

- “My work ends at 8:30pm, so I have less time with my newborn child” (a survey respondent, a man, Singapore)
- “Sometimes decrease focus on my children's school activities” (a survey respondent, a man, PNG)
- “Not being able to take time to take care of the family during the work of the department” (a survey respondent, a man, Myanmar)
- “I am a single mom with 4 kids and have to manage the clinic by myself” (a survey respondent, a woman, Indonesia)
- “During the weekend, to add income to the meager salary I have [...], I need to tend to patients just to increase the monthly income. Thus, decreasing the time I can spend with my daughters” (a survey respondent, a woman, Philippines)

Overall, despite common perception, work-life balance concerns appear to be equally important for women and men veterinarians and paravets.

Thinking of quitting the veterinary profession

The themes that came out in relation to work-life balance closely resonate to the themes that were brought up in response to the question “Have you ever thought of quitting the veterinary profession?” When the survey asked the respondents this question, about 60% answered with a confident “No”. However, about 20% acknowledged that they had such thoughts. Combined with 14% of those who were not sure and 7% of those who preferred not to answer, there are over 40% of surveyed vets and VPPs who may be facing professional burn out at some point of their careers (Please see full number in Annex 3, Q23).

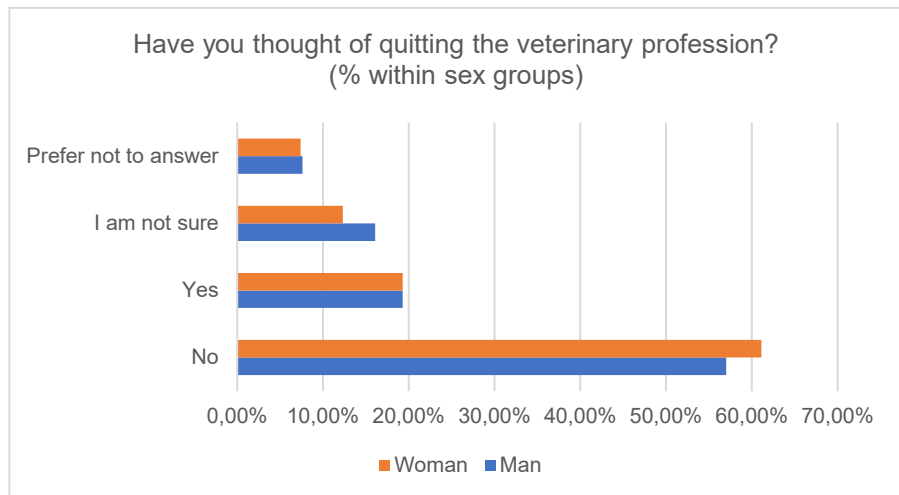
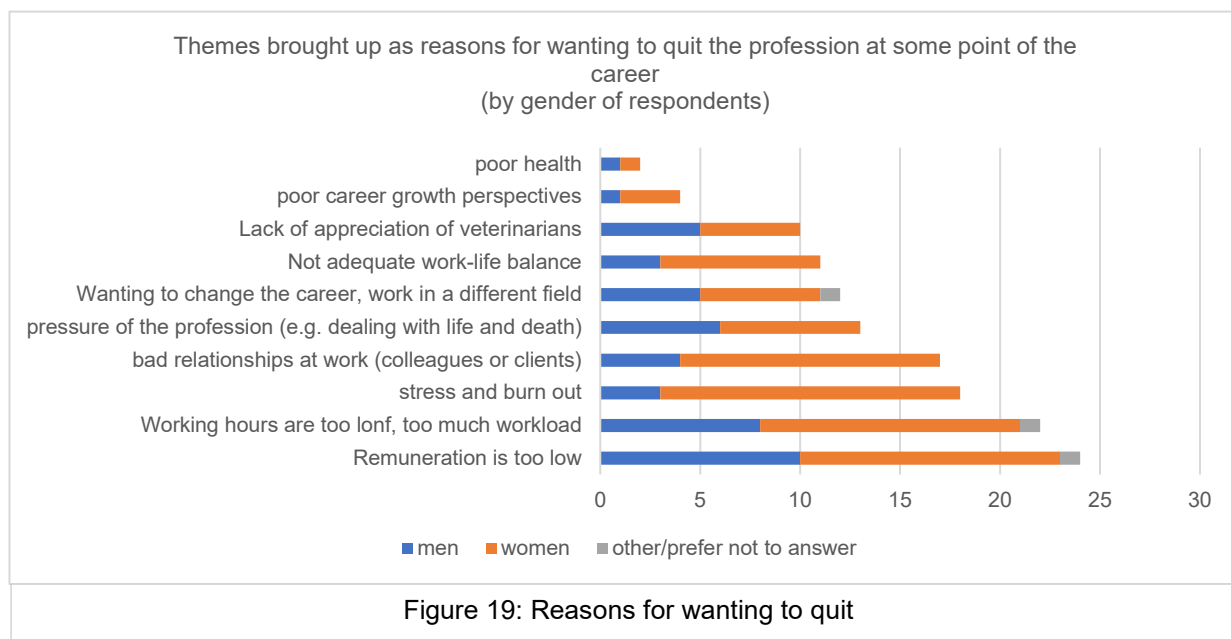


Figure 18: Have you thought of quitting the veterinary profession (by % of respondents within their sex group)

Thoughts about quitting the profession were not dependent on gender. In fact, the same proportion of women (19.3% out of all women respondents) and men (19.3% out of all men

respondents) chose to answer “yes” to this question. There were slightly more women who chose a confident “No” (61% out of all women respondents) compared to men (57% out of all men respondents) (Fig.18). This data, to some extent, addresses the concern that women quit after starting a family. In this survey, we were not able to reach women who could have quit the profession; however, among those continuing, only a very small portion said that they had to quit or were thinking of quitting because of having small children. And, as we saw from previous questions, women overall are able to find a good balance between family and work.



The reasons for quitting were very close to those mentioned as difficulties in finding work-life balance, and they were even more interconnected. The most popular theme can be summarised as “too much workload that eats up personal time and is not adequately remunerated and (or) appreciated”. The leading cause for women can be formulated as “bad relationships at work (either with colleagues or with clients)”.

In addition, it came out prominently through this, and other parts of the survey for in-service professionals, that people were concerned about their industry not getting enough attention, being under-resourced and under-staffed, and not receiving appropriate recognition for the important work that is being done.

For the summary of the reasons, please see the Figure 19.

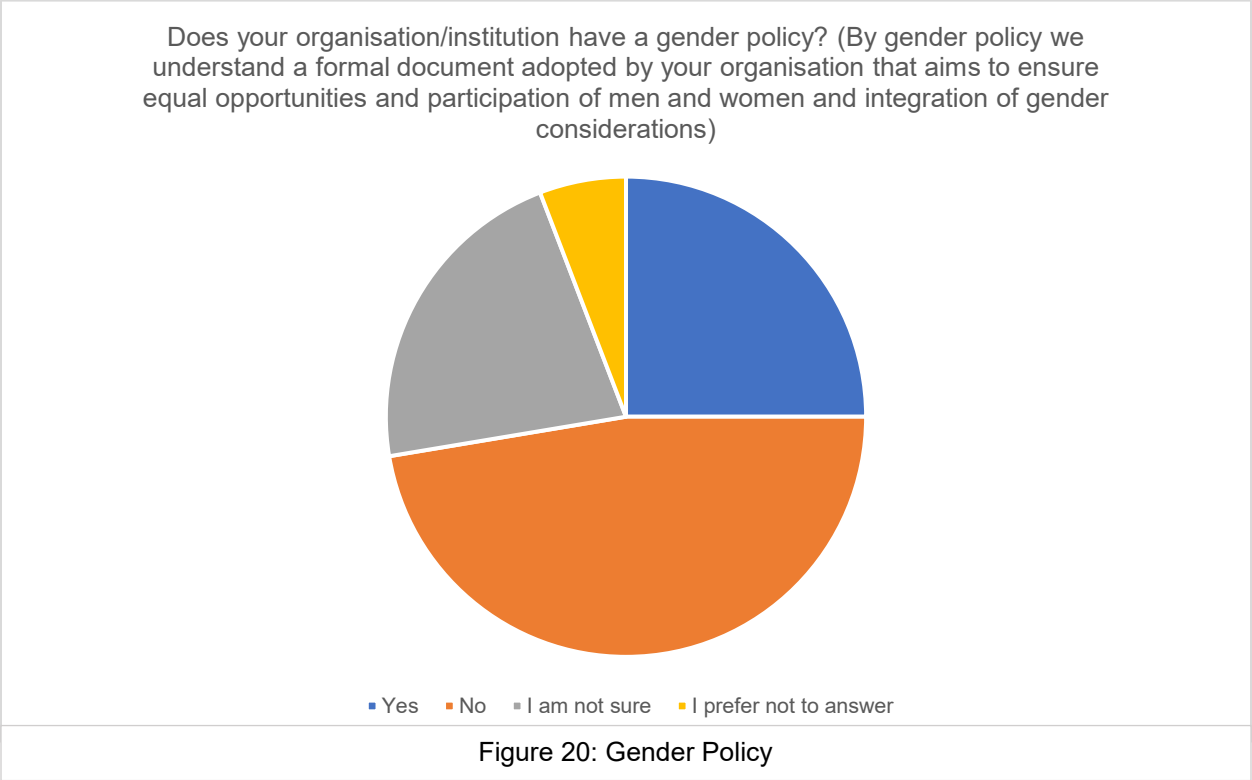
Main messages:

- 40% of all respondents reported problems in maintaining work-life balance; this problem is equally significant for men and women.
- The main challenges are rooted in the nature of the profession, with work often “spilling over” into personal life; institutional support to address this issue is lacking.
- An alarming number of vets and VPPs (about 40%) – men and women alike – may be facing professional burn out at some point of their careers.

Gender policy

The survey respondents were asked if their respective organisation had a policy document related to gender, and/or a formal document promoting equal opportunities for men and women and the

integration of gender considerations into the organisation’s operations. One quarter of all respondents suggested that such a document existed in their organisation. About 47% of people said that there is no gender policy where they work, about 22% were not sure and about 6% preferred not to answer this question (Fig.20).



In the follow-up open-ended question, the participants had a chance to elaborate further about the gender policy in their organisation. The question was formulated as follows: “If you have any comments regarding your organisation's gender policy (or the lack of it), please share them here”. Substantive comments to this question were provided by 46 respondents.

Several respondents from the Philippines worked in the agency that has a policy titled “Gender and Development Program (GAP)”. Many respondents from the Philippines provided positive comments about the GAP suggesting that it is well-implemented. However, there were several respondents from the Philippines who were either not aware of any existing gender policy or didn’t know much about it. In addition, several respondents mentioned that the policy lacked enforcement: “I wonder if we indeed had one, will the older high-ranking personnel even follow it?” (a survey respondent, a woman, Philippines).

In Cambodia, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategic Framework in Agriculture 2022-2026. This document recognises limited representation of women in leadership positions, including within the livestock sector. It also mentions barriers that ethnic minority groups face in accessing information on livestock production.

The interview respondent from Timor-Leste shared that there is a gender policy implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, however, even though it exists on paper, it is poorly financed. For example, the policy aims at empowering women from rural areas, yet to achieve its results there

is a strong need to improve infrastructure, such as building proper roads, improving markets' safety and so on. Therefore, even though the policy is adopted by one ministry, its success is dependent on whole-of-the-government approach.

Several comments from in-service professionals' survey participants also emphasized the importance of policy enforcement:

- “Lack of enforcement and encouragement for staff to exercise the code of conduct of gender equity at the workplace does not produce conducive and safe environment for staff to report cases of discrimination” (a survey respondent, Singapore);
- “There was a gender policy and our institutions were the first to promote gender balance in the leadership but unfortunately not many of the women in our institutions that are actively involved in the training and taking part to lead the discussion” (a survey respondent, a women, Timor-Leste).

There was a portion of comments in the survey suggesting that even though there was no formal document in their organisation, the equality principles were still observed. Some people commented that their organisation was too small to have a formal gender policy. When we discussed the idea of a gender policy with women during interviews, most of them were supportive of this idea.

“I think, we need a gender policy. I was trying to encourage the Department to develop one. If we could have a general guideline defining what is discrimination and how to ensure safe working environment for women, it would be helpful. And what to do if something needs to be addressed. The thing is that the [HR] personnel is already overwhelmed with work and if WOAHA could suggest a model document, even in English, this would be big help” (Interview, woman veterinarian, Thailand)

Main trends:

- *Almost half of in-service survey respondents reported that there is no gender related policy in the organisation where they work.*

Summary of main trends

Gender composition of veterinarianian sector:

- As noted in 2015, veterinary professions continue to feminise in South-East Asia.
- In some instances, women occupy top-tier positions (there were none reported in 2015).
- Men occupy most of the positions that emphasise physical work in remote areas.

Perception of Gender equality:

- The majority of respondents believed that women are not impacted by gender inequality within the veterinary sector in their countries; however, respondents also provided examples of how gender did affect them. The factors that could have affected respondents' views are: specifics of the sample group, potential low awareness of inequality. Additional research could be helpful to understand these views in more nuance.

Education:

- The trend, reported in 2015, continues: women vet students outnumber men.
- Despite the availability of governmental support for higher education, veterinary education may be inaccessible for women from less advantaged groups, especially from the countries that don't have their own VEEs.
- The majority of surveyed students expressed satisfaction with how their programs are preparing them for work; however, 80% wanted to have more hands-on learning.
- One quarter of surveyed students report experiencing different treatment because of their gender.
- Veterinary students may not be receiving adequate preparation to address gender considerations within their profession.

Early career:

- More women tend to select the veterinary profession because of love for animals, pragmatic, financial and intellectual reasons, while more men brought up reasons related to the desire to contribute to human health and well-being.
- The ideal work scenario for majority of current women students was working for private clinic dealing with small pets (39%); two second popular answers were working for a private company dealing with farm animals (17%) and working for the government (17%).
- More women vets and VPPs find their first jobs quickly compared to men; however, young women experience more discrimination in the onset of their careers because of compounding effects of age and gender. Having a mentor or a woman role model helps young women to overcome early-career challenges.

Career Progression:

- Men and women have similar number of moves between organisations; about one third of both, men and women respondents were in their first workplace.
- The most popular reason to choose the current workplace was proximity to one's family; this was number one reason for women, and second most popular reason for men.
- Women appear to be facing stagnation in promotion and salary increase more often than men.
- One quarter of all surveyed women who are currently working reported being treated differently because of their gender; the reported instances vary from minor incidents to serious violations such as denying promotion, bullying by clients or sexual harassment.

Women in Leadership positions:

- Women in the veterinary sector face a “glass ceiling”: it is difficult for them to raise beyond a certain level in professional hierarchy.
- The major constraints for women are:
 - higher pressure to prove their competencies compared to men,
 - expectation of even longer working hours at higher managerial levels,
 - cultural preferences towards men leaders,
 - limited institutional support enabling to utilize career growth opportunities,
 - less informal networking opportunities with decision makers.
- Institutional enabling factors that support women in implementing their role as family caregivers have positive impact on women’s career growth.

Women on Farms:

- There is a stereotype that women are not fit to work on farms.
- About 65% of all women student survey respondents indicated that they are likely to apply for a job in a countryside after graduation.
- Women students are discouraged from working with farm animals during education.
- If the stereotype about women not being fit to work on farms is not addressed within the educational system, in the future, the industry will miss a substantive number of capable employees, while women will have less options for career development.

Work-Life Balance and Professional Burn Out:

- 40% of all respondents reported problems in maintaining work-life balance; this problem is equally significant for men and women.
- The main challenges are rooted in the nature of the profession, with work often “spilling over” into personal life; institutional support to address this issue is lacking.
- An alarming number of vets and VPPs (about 40%) – men and women alike – may be facing professional burn out at some point of their careers.

Gender Policy:

- Almost half of in-service survey respondents reported that there is no gender policy in the organisation where they work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This analysis suggests that SEA countries made progress in women's empowerment within the animal health sector – a field that was historically seen as masculine. The trend reported in 2015 – growing numbers of women veterinarians – continues in the region. Several women emerged in top-tier leadership positions within the veterinary sector during the past eight years. Out of twelve WOAHA Delegates in the countries participating in this assessment, currently four are women (one third). Women are well-represented in the mid- and upper-mid level management positions. Yet most women may be still facing a “glass ceiling” in terms of career progression and salary increases.

Another trend reported in 2015 - women preferring companion animals to livestock practices - is also pronounced, yet it should be nuanced considering cultural specificities of this region. This assessment found that many women enjoy and feel capable of working with large animals. However, systemic barriers are hampering women from realizing their full potential in this professional stream, including barriers within the educational system. At the same time, despite still existing stereotypes, in some countries (e.g., Malaysia and Thailand) women vets' and VPPs' work with cattle is already normalised and welcomed by the farmers.

Overall, there is a perception of gender equity within the veterinary sector in SEA. Yet, 25% of all working women participating in this assessment reported experiencing different treatment because of their gender. The cited instances ranged from minor incidents to serious problems such as bullying and aggressive behavior by clients, being excluded from promotion and (or) professional growth opportunities, and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Our analysis also demonstrated that despite women graduates entering the job market even somewhat faster than their men peers, they encounter discrimination because of the intersections of age and gender, particularly from clients, but often from managers and colleagues as well. This may partially explain why women veterinarians and VPPs are promoted less frequently compared to their men colleagues. In addition, many women respondents reported the need to work twice as hard to prove their competencies. It is often decided for women that family should be prioritized, even though many women are willing to make family arrangements to take up professional opportunities. Whenever research participants spoke about the environment favoring work-life balance, it was mostly thanks to good intentions of their colleagues, but almost never due to institutionalized policies. At the same time, countries that have policies supporting women in implementing their family roles along with careers, have higher women's participation in labour force and less evidence of the “glass ceiling” effect (e.g., Malaysia).

Veterinarians, regardless of gender, report high levels of professional burn-out. Participants raised concerns about their sector being under-resourced, under-staffed and lacking appropriate recognition of the value that veterinarians bring to society. Addressing these concerns, institutionalising work-life balance and gender equity policies will have positive impacts for all genders, and particularly support women in achieving their full potential as highly qualified professionals.

Recommendations

For Governmental Organisations

1. Continue to address broader gender issues that are endemic for many professional sectors, including ensuring equal pay and promotional opportunities, and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace (e.g., following ILO's guidance on the implementation of the Violence and Harassment Convention No.190).
2. Enhance systems to regularly collect gender-disaggregated labour force data, including public and private sectors, veterinarians and VPPs; collaborate with VEEs to collect gender disaggregated data on veterinary and VPP graduates to use for labour force planning.
3. Integrate gender considerations into national workforce assessments and planning.
4. Implement mentorship programs for women – early-career professionals. Mentorship opportunities prove to be effective in increasing confidence of women who are early-career professionals and equipping them with skills to address professional challenges, including those that are related to different treatment because of their gender. Mentorship sessions can be organised online; pairing mentors and mentees from different countries within the region could be an approach to explore.
5. Increase availability of family-oriented facilities (such as day care) within proximity of workstations, both in urban and rural areas.
6. To address professional burn out among veterinarians, support flexible working arrangements to address work-life balance issues for employees of all genders.
7. Create institutional support to assist women in utilising more career growth opportunities (e.g. childcare grants to accompany training opportunities).
8. Develop and (or) enhance gender equity policies that are designed to address specific needs of women within the veterinary sector; women employees from all levels should be meaningfully engaged in the process of developing such policies to ensure that various needs are considered and addressed. Address work-place harassment in accordance with ILO Convention No.190 and Recommendation No.260.

For VEEs

9. Address gender stereotyping within VEEs that prevent more women from getting knowledge and skills that are necessary to work with livestock animals. Several strategies may be deployed to address gender stereotypes around women and large animals, including:
 - (9.1) Develop and (or) implement an online asynchronous professional development course for academic staff working in VEEs. The course should orient participants on the basic and practical concepts of gender equity and equality, stimulate self-reflection, and provide practical recommendations regarding promoting gender equality in the class (e.g., what language to use, how to adjust questions and assignments);
 - (9.2) Develop and (or) implement an online asynchronous course on gender for students pursuing professions related to the veterinary field. The topics may include how gender considerations in relation to women farmers, women and zoonotic diseases, working conditions of women veterinarians;
10. Increase the availability of hands-on study experiences for women to gain skills necessary to work with livestock animals, including internships on farms.

For WOA

11. Support countries in integrating gender considerations into national workforce assessment and planning initiatives. For example, consider including a section on gender in the workforce assessment tool and include gender considerations in workforce development workshops.
(11.1) Encourage countries factoring gender into national workforce development strategies, design a workshop module on integrating gender considerations that can be adapted and adopted at country level. The module can address broad scope of issues identified within this assessment, including supporting early career/young women veterinarians and VPPs, addressing barriers that prevent women from being promoted as frequently as men, creating supportive working environment for women who have younger children.
12. Develop or adapt and promote existing online asynchronous professional development course on gender that can be taken by in-service professionals at all levels and from different type of organisations, both from private and public sector.
13. Support countries in developing gender policies and (or) gender equity plans for veterinary services by creating a model document that can be easily adopted for specific organisations. In developing the gender policy model document, the experience of the Philippines can be studied further, as the Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Animal Industry is already implementing Gender and Development Program (GAP). Such policy or equity plan could also include the components to address the issues of work-life balance and professional burn out for all genders. In addition, the model should address the questions of gender-based / sexual harassment in workplaces.
(13.1) Create a repository of existing gender policies so that countries can learn from each other (for example, as part of digitalized PVS Pathway Training Platform).
14. Consider establishing and supporting a regional network of women leaders within the veterinary sector in SEA. A bi-annual Forum could be held to exchange best practices on national implementation of gender equality policies, provide platform for young women leadership development, and discuss other aspects of gender related to agriculture and livestock development.

For further research

15. Studies, including Knowledge, Attitude, Practices (KAP) studies to assess specific gender discriminatory practices within the professional environment and educational/academic settings (and developing strategies to address them);
16. Assessment of factors contributing to professional burn-out of veterinarians and the ways to address them;
17. Assessment focusing on gender issues specific to VPPs and CAHWs (ideally, to be conducted in local languages) and the needs of women livestock keepers; gendered aspects of interaction and communication between veterinarians and farmers/ breeders, and the ways to improve them.
18. Stock take analysis of the different gender-related policies in place throughout the industry, their enforcement/implementation and impactful.
19. Country-specific case studies to illustrate progress made in gender equality and women empowerment in country-specific contexts.

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Annexes

Annex 1: [Survey Respondents' Demographics](#)

Annex 2: [List of Interviewees](#)

Annex 3: [Quantitative questions analysed](#)

Annex 4: [Qualitative questions analysed](#)

Annex 5: [Pre-service survey questions analysed](#)

Annex 6: [Survey Questionnaire \(in-service\)](#)

Annex 7: [Survey Questionnaire \(pre-service\)](#)

Annex 8: [Women in Leadership positions](#)

Annex 9: [Informed Consent Template](#)