

Medical Students' Perspectives on Family Planning and Fertility when Deciding on a Specialty: A Scoping Review

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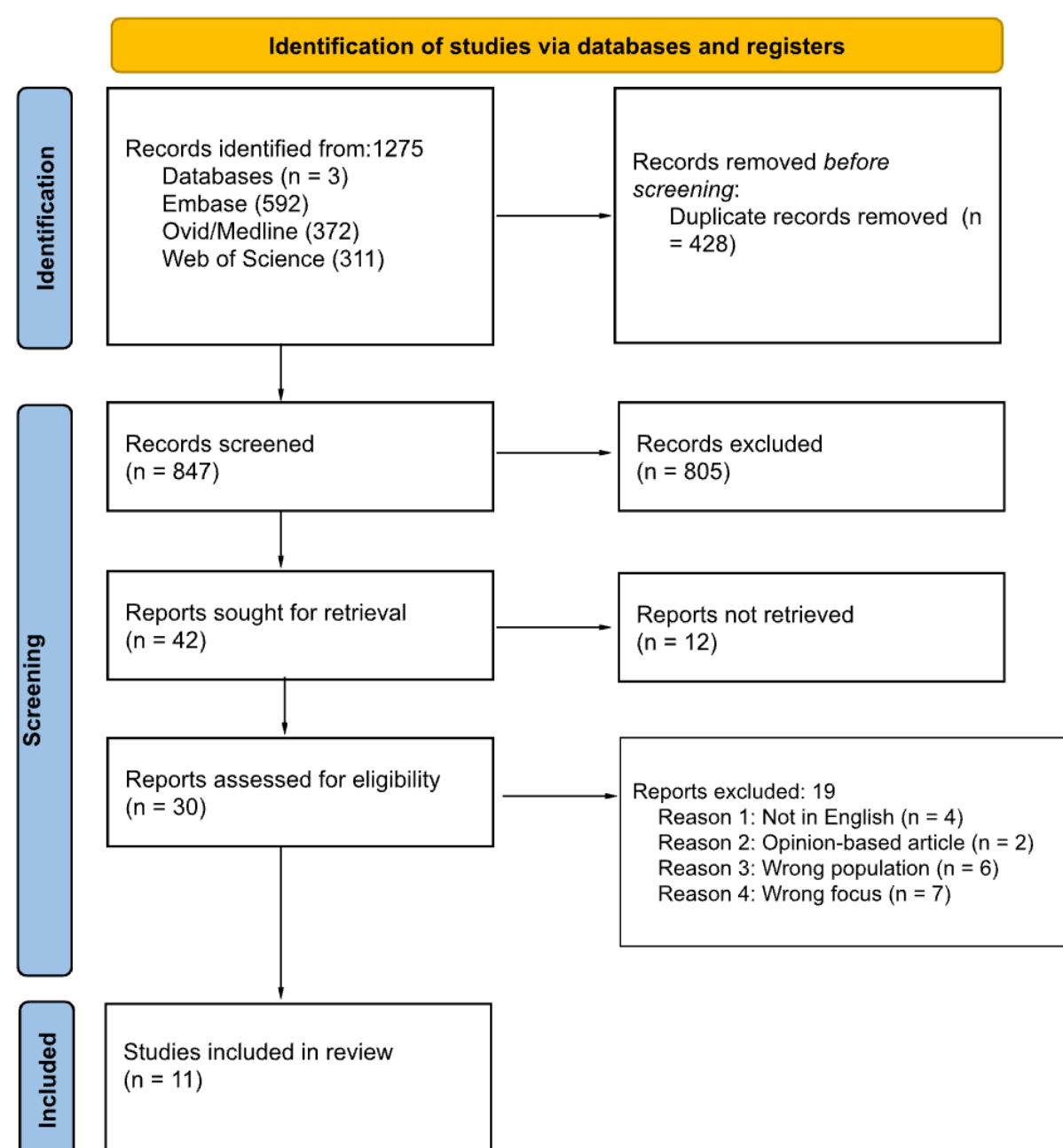
BACKGROUND

- **Fertility and family planning** are common concerns for medical students.
- **Female students** often feel a more profound sense of **preoccupation** regarding family planning, pregnancy, and child rearing due to social and biological differences.
- As a result, certain **specialties struggle to recruit women** despite a growing female presence in medical education.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this review is to identify themes in current literature that explain how medical students' attitudes towards family planning and fertility during medical training influence their choice of specialty.

FIGURE 1. PRISMA METHOD CHART



METHODS

- An initial literature search was performed in March 2024.
- Papers were included should the study involve medical students (at any point in their education prior to entering residency) and if family planning and/or fertility factors were addressed in the context of selecting a specialty.
- We had a particular interest in female students, but did not limit the review as the **male perspective is also important to consider and use as a comparison**.
- We had wanted to focus on selection of surgical specialties but felt that it would limit the study to an unreasonable degree.

RESULTS

- The initial search yielded 1275 articles, which were reviewed by the first 3 authors.
- **11 articles** were ultimately included in this review.
- Seven were specialty-specific, with most focusing on surgical specialties (Figures 2 and 3)
- Two studies analyzed parental leave policies while the remaining examined general medical student perspectives and factors affecting specialty choice.
- **Several themes were identified:**
 - 1) Family planning, fertility, and work-life balance were perceived to be **more challenging in surgical specialties** than non-surgical specialties.
 - 2) Students consider **female mentors**, residents who have children already, and **parental leave policies** when selecting programs.
 - 3) **Barriers to family planning** include **time** during training, feeling like a **burden**, and worrying about **interrupting career** momentum for parenthood.
 - 4) Certain **considerations have been suggested** to improve female presence in specific specialties such as increased **mentorship**, **shortened training** periods with **integrated programs**, and **earlier exposure** to specific specialties.

Figure 2. Specialty of Interest

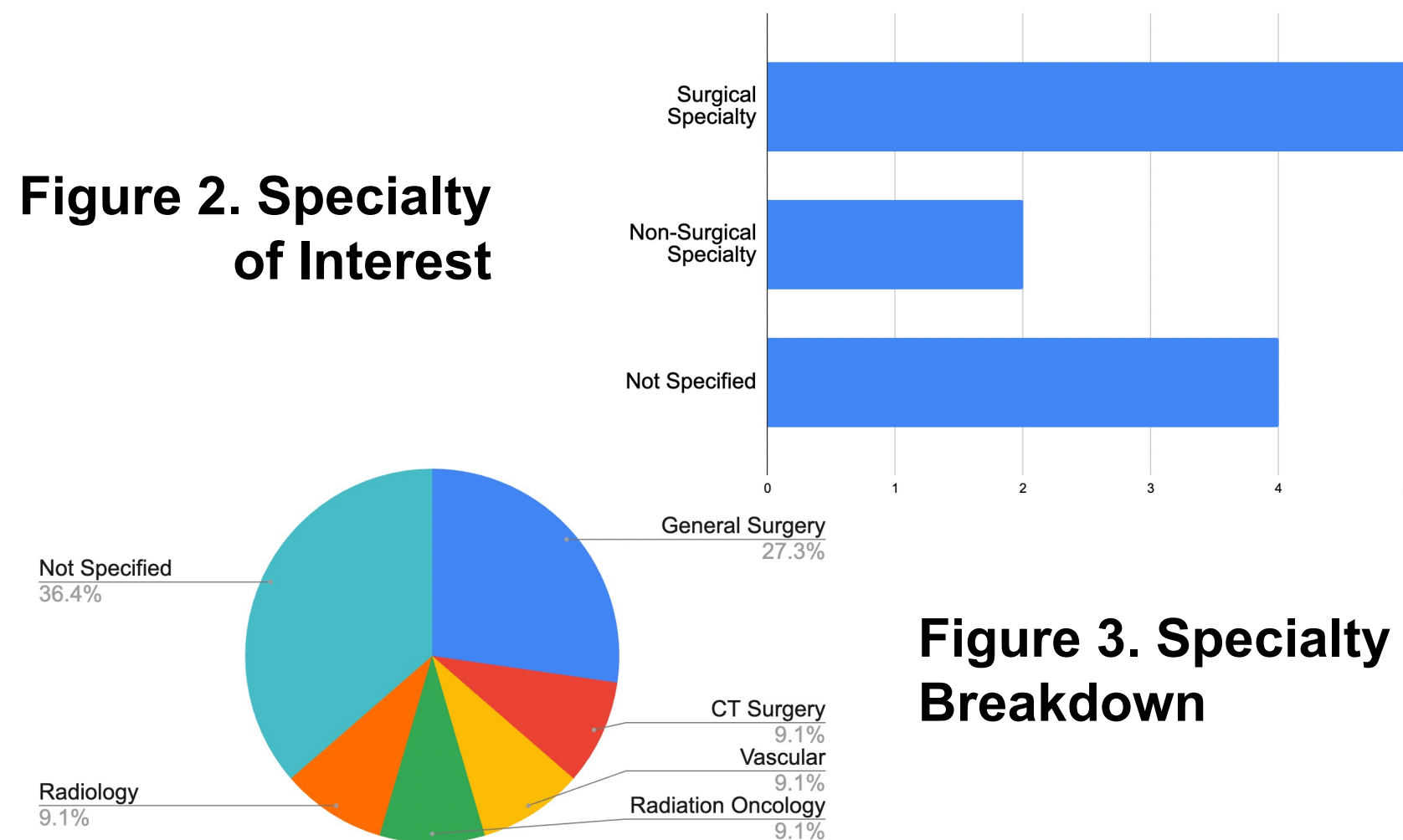


Figure 3. Specialty Breakdown

CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- The findings of this review highlight that family planning and fertility concerns are **significant considerations for many medical students** when contemplating a specialty.
- Consequently, **certain specialties, notably surgical ones, may face challenges** in supplying the growing demands of the physician workforce.
- Although suggestions have been proposed to enhance female recruitment in specialties perceived as less 'family friendly,' there is still a **gap in the literature** regarding **whether these interventions effectively augment female representation** in such specialties.
- Additionally, future literature may want to focus on gender-stratified data to elucidate challenges specifically affecting women.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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