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Session : Woman In Transplantation (WIT)

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Session Title : Experiences of Women in Academic Surgery

Experiences of Women in Academic Surgery

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This study applies the Straussian grounded theory to explore the experiences of women faculty members in surgical fields. Additionally, it investigates their survival strategies in this field that was once considered a “no woman’s land.” Interviews were conducted with 15 women who currently hold, or had previously held, a faculty position in various surgical disciplines in Korea. The data were analyzed through a process of open, axial, and selective coding using constant comparison techniques and memo-writing. A grounded theory of women surgical faculty members’ experiences during their training years and careers, starting from applying for the discipline to their promotion—and in a few cases, retirement—was developed around the core category of overcoming adversities, that is, how they negotiated a sticky professional floor. The theory was underpinned by four themes and 16 subthemes. The four themes included: sticky floor and broken trail ropes; strategies; triumphant and resentful; and building new resources. The 16 subthemes included: old-fashioned sexism; modern sexism or micro-aggression; exclusion from various types of “rooms”; women struggling to strike a work–home balance; invisible women and absence of mentorship; silent endurance; mobilizing external resources; (not) exerting “feminine” strength; learning from the follies of others; self-esteem and self-fulfillment; insight and flexibility; burnout; pressure of over-representation; improving the system by enhancing transparency and fairness; building a network of support; and mentoring. This theory explains how women faculty members in surgical fields define themselves and their experiences. Additionally, it illustrates their strategies to achieve their goals. The theory captures the impacts of both: their circumstances, and their response. This is a first-of-its-kind study in Korea, which can inspire research in various directions, such as exclusion and inclusion mechanisms; burnout; women’s networking; over-representation; and leadership—just to name a few.