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МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОХОРОНИ ЗДОРОВ'Я УКРАЇНИ
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МІЖНАРОДНА АКАДЕМІЯ ПРИКЛАДНИХ НАУК В ЛОМЖІ

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NEXT: IFNMU EDU

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Актуальні питання підвищення
якості освітнього процесу

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STIGMATIZATION IN THE MEDICAL PROFESSION THROUGH THE EYES OF MEDICAL STUDENTS AND PHD CANDIDATES

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Background. Stigmatization in medicine is often discussed in relation to patients, while stereotypes directed at medical professionals receive less attention. Such attitudes may influence professional identity, communication with patients, career choices and relationships between generations of physicians. They are especially important during medical training, when students and PhD candidates are developing their understanding of professional authority and responsibility.

Aim. The study aimed to identify the forms of professional stigmatization noticed or reproduced by medical students and PhD candidates and to determine which age-, gender- and experience-related stereotypes remain visible in the medical environment.

Materials and methods. The findings are based on surveys conducted in 2025–2026 among medical students and PhD candidates. Approximately 5,000 people were invited, and 240 completed the survey. Participation was voluntary. Responses were analysed descriptively to identify recurring forms of stigmatization. The response rate was 4.8%; therefore, the results provide an exploratory picture of participants' experiences rather than representative estimates for the entire university community.

Results. The respondents described several recurrent forms of stigmatization. Young physicians were sometimes judged by patients because of their age and perceived lack of experience. Typical messages included doubts such as “Who would ever come to you for treatment?” Such statements questioned competence before it could be demonstrated and linked clinical trust to age rather than knowledge or performance.

Gender-related stigmatization was expressed through patronising forms of address, including diminutive suffixes with references equivalent to “young nurse - sestrychka” and expressions such as “lady doctor – zhinochka likar”. These labels reduced professional status and emphasised gender instead of qualification. Respondents also reported gendered expectations concerning specialties. Paediatrics was perceived as a “female” specialty, whereas urology was viewed as a “male” field. Such assumptions may influence career choices and patients' responses to physicians who do not match the expected gender profile of a specialty.

A different pattern was reported in relation to gynaecology. Respondents did not describe comparable negative stigma towards male gynaecologists. Instead, some mentioned a favourable stereotype that a male gynaecologist may be “better” because he supposedly does not subconsciously envy a female patient. Although presented positively, this belief remains gender-biased because it privileges men on the basis of an unfounded assumption and indirectly devalues female gynaecologists.

Age-based stigma was not directed only at young doctors. Some respondents themselves described older physicians as conservative, rigid, resistant to innovation and unable to follow professional progress. Ageism may therefore work in both directions: patients may distrust young doctors because they are assumed to lack experience, while younger members of the profession may dismiss senior colleagues because they are assumed to lack flexibility.

Conclusions. Stigmatization in the medical profession is multidirectional and may be based on age, gender, specialty and perceived experience. Even apparently favourable stereotypes can restrict professional roles and reproduce inequality. Medical education should address these attitudes through professional-identity training, gender-sensitive communication, respectful forms of address and intergenerational cooperation. Students and PhD candidates should learn to distinguish evidence-based assessment of competence from judgements based on age, gender or specialty. Larger studies are needed to determine how these attitudes influence career choice, workplace relations and patient trust.