

Perception and Attitude of Undergraduate Dental Students Towards Dental Specialty and Career Choices: A Cross Sectional Survey

Rohan K Bhatt¹ Megha C. Patel² Vijeta S. Raj^{3*} Lipee D. Dave⁴ Lilavanti L.Vaghela⁵

¹Professor, Department of Pedodontics, Karnavati School of Dentistry, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

²Professor, Department of Pedodontics, Karnavati School of Dentistry, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

³PG Student, Department of Pedodontics, Karnavati School of Dentistry, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Pedodontics, Karnavati School of Dentistry, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

⁵PG Student, Department of Pedodontics, Karnavati School of Dentistry, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

ABSTRACT

Background: To assess perception and attitude of undergraduate dental students towards dental specialty and career choices.

Materials and methods: A cross sectional survey using self-administered questionnaire was conducted among 200 undergraduate dental students. The questionnaire enquired about best preferences for further studies among the list of specialties, career options, factors that impacts their preferred choice. The data was analyzed with IBM SPSS 20 for windows statistical software.

Result: Prosthodontics (n=36; 24%) was leading choice for specialization followed by Oral surgery (n=25; 16.66%) ($P<0.001$), and 45.33% (n=68) ($p<0.001$) believed they may face saturation in the field as future obstacle.

Conclusion: This study shows the preferred specialties, career choices and probable obstacles in future which can be a baseline for establishing national policies for the improvement of graduate programs.

Keywords: Dental specialties, Career choices, Future obstacles.

INTRODUCTION

Career option refers to the extent to which a person seeks involvement in a career as central to his or her future life. Choice of health care profession overweighs the other professions due to selfless values and service orientation. The students have numerous career options and it is difficult to choose the best option that would satisfy their passion and income. The choice of dentistry as a career sounds appealing for many families in the world. As licensed healthcare workers, dentists occupy an important position in society. Students' attitude toward and reasons for choosing careers are of great interest for educational systems around the

world. There have been several studies by dental educators and researchers concerning the motives for entering the dental profession.¹

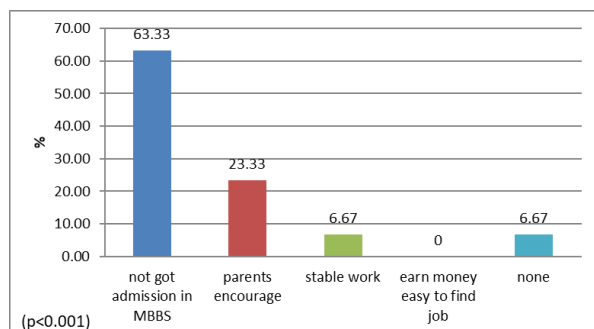
While joining under graduation, the students are attracted toward the course because of the social and professional status, increased quality of life and income, others' recommendations, and to play a role in community health care services. Most of the students seek post graduate admissions after completing their under graduation. However, the number of seats available for post-graduation is very less compared to the graduation of under graduate students each year. This is a big tailback in career prospects of dentist.

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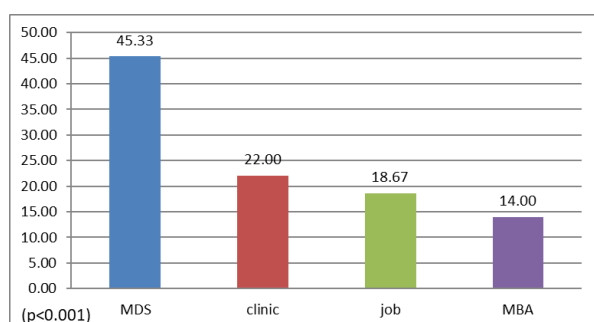
*Correspondence Dr. Vijeta S. Raj.

Department of Pedodontics, Karnavati School of Dentistry, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

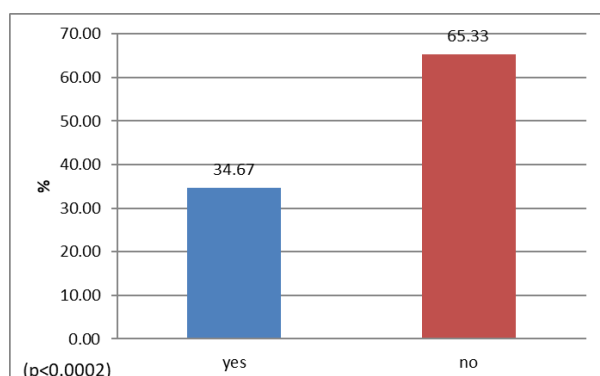
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Graph 1: why chose dentistry as career?



Graph 2: what is the plan after graduation?

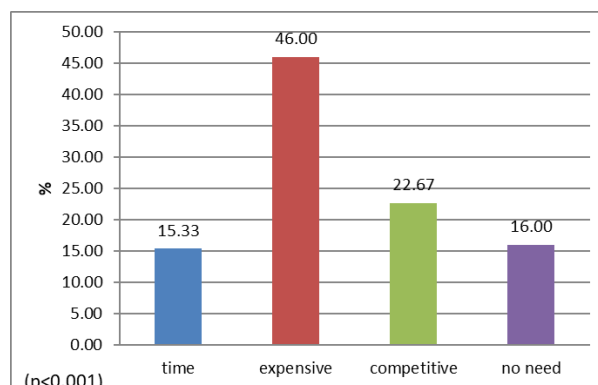


Graph 3: Plan to go abroad for further studies.

Moreover less dental job opportunities in India, increased budding of new private dental clinics and less recognition of dental qualification overseas, have created intense pressure on the dental graduates. In particular, it is essential to understand the motivating factors, priorities, perceptions of the profession who choose to study dentistry.² Many individuals find themselves in occupations without truly understanding the reasons for their attraction to their career.³

Consequently, this study was designed to elicit the career attitudes toward the future of dentistry and levels of interest in various postgraduate specialties

among undergraduate dental students at the dental colleges of Gandhinagar.



Graph 4: Factors that discourage from doing specialization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present survey used semi structured, self-administered questionnaire composed with 11 multiple-choice questions which was distributed among undergraduate dental students of Gandhinagar city. A total of 200 students were invited to participate in the survey. 155 of the students returned the completed questionnaire. The overall response rate was 77.5%. The students were not allowed to re-participate in the survey once completed. Before scheduling the survey, the official permission was obtained from the Ethical Committee. The questionnaire assessed the attitude and perception of undergraduate dental students towards dental specialty and career choices and future obstacles. The sample size was calculated using the formula:

95% confidence interval
p that is expected to be about 50% (0.50)
margin of error (d) no more than 0.07
 $n = (1.96^2)(0.50)(1-0.50)/(0.07^2)$.
n = 200

The final data was analyzed with IBM SPSS 20 for windows statistical software. Statistical analysis was done using chi Square Test for categorical data. For all statistical analyses, probability levels of $P < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Of the 200 questionnaires distributed to dental students, 155 students completed and returned,

giving an overall response rate 77.5%.the resulting samples consisted of 25.8%males and 70.96%females.

Choice of dentistry as career

63.33% (n=95) chose dentistry as they didn't get admission in MBBS.23.33% (n=35) chose because of parents encouragement.6.67% (n=10) pursued as it offered stable work (Graph1) which was significant ($p<0.001$)

Career preference

45.33% (n=68) students were planning for post-graduation.22 % (n=33) students wanted to do clinical practice.18.67% (n=28) students would like to pursue job whereas 14% (n=21) students were going to pursue MBA. ($p<0.001$) (Graph 2)

Plan for abroad

34.67% (n=52) students were planning to settle in abroad and 65.33 % (n=98) students would continue their practice in India ($p=0.0002$) (Graph 3)

Discouragement for post-graduation

Students were asked about the reasons which stops them doing post-graduation .15.33% (n=23) students said it is the time. According to **46% (n=69) it is very expensive** followed by 22.67 % (n=34) it is competitive and 16% (n=24) students were not interested in post-graduation ($p<0.001$)(Graph 4)

Specialty preference

The result of the survey showed that most preferred specialty was prosthodontics followed by oral surgery. 14.67% preferred pedodontics whereas less students preferred public health dentistry (Graph 5)

Future obstacles

According to 45.33% students they would face saturation followed by lack of work satisfaction (34.67%) and competition (8.00%) ($p<0.001$) (Graph 6) as future obstacles.

DISCUSSION

The perceptions of graduating dental students concerning the dental specialty , motivation and support system are very important .This study evaluated the perception and career choices among undergraduate dental students .For this purpose, a primary questionnaire was created which included a variety of questions regarding career choices for dental students

Based on the study results the most important factors influencing these students choice of dentistry was not getting admission in MBBS (63.33%). In India, admission into the medicine/dentistry course is highly competitive and requires a high grade on the admission test, which is in multiple-choice format. Second reason was family influence as most students live with their parents who play an important role in making decision in the students' lives. 23.33 percent students in our study were encouraged by their parents to pursue dentistry as a professional course this situation is comparable to that in studies conducted by karibe et al, Marino et al, Jover et al and Tangade et al who reported that parents were very influential among Asian students. This study also revealed that students in India are highly influenced by their families in making important decisions.⁴

When asked about pursuing specialty in dentistry, 16 % of the total respondents said they did not plan to specialize and the largest group (45.33%) said they had decided to specialize.This is in accordance with previous studies where the majority of the students prefer further studies as their future plans.⁵ The reason might be because of the limited job opportunities available for dental graduates and the competition faced in private practice. Specialization in dentistry is rewarding to have better financial stability as compared to graduates. (Scarbecz and Ross, 2007).⁶

General dentistry was believed to have the second best future in terms of overall impact on the profession of dentistry with 22% entering private practice and 18.67 percent of the respondents reported that they would choose to immediately enter a career in academics while 14% students would pursue MBA.

Specialty/general dentistry preferences

The results of this survey showed that the most preferred specialty was Restorative and Aesthetic Dentistry. Specialization in dentistry is rewarding and it has been reported that dental specialists earn higher income compared to general dentists (Scarbecz and Ross, 2007). However, general dentists meet the treatment needs of a large percentage of the population in Saudi Arabia. In our study, though results regarding specialization seem promising, there are concerns regarding the low percentage of final year students interested in general dentistry (4.2%) and public health dentistry (3.6%). Therefore, a greater need exists for specialty/general dentistry preferences. The results of this survey showed that the most preferred specialty was Restorative and Aesthetic Dentistry. Specialization in dentistry is rewarding and it has been reported that dental specialists earn higher income compared to general dentists

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is not in agreement with the results of a comparative study among Japanese and Swedish dental students which reported that the majority of dental students in both countries perceived their course duration to be reasonable (77% in Sweden and 62% in Japan) (Karibe et al., 2009). 4.2. Specialty/general dentistry preferences

The results of this survey showed that the most preferred specialty was prosthodontics as it is oldest and most evolving branch. Awareness for implants and prosthesis among patients has also increased. There are concerns regarding the low percentage of students interested in public health dentistry. Single institution studies conducted in 2011 reported that Prosthodontics followed by Orthodontics were the most preferred specialties among male dental students (Al-Dlaigan et al., 2011) ⁷

About 34.67% of our respondents reported that they had intentions to study abroad as they believe there are better opportunities abroad which is higher than that reported in an Iranian study (Baharvand et al., 2011).⁸ The majority of the participants (59.33%) reported that the course duration of dentistry is reasonable and 29.33% reported that it is too long. This is in agreement with the results of a comparative study among Japanese and Swedish dental students which reported that the majority of dental students in both countries perceived their course duration to be reasonable (77% in Sweden and 62% in Japan) (Karibe et al., 2009).⁴

In the study, the students reported obstacles they might face in the future were saturation, financial crisis and lack of work satisfaction. Due to mushroom-like growth of the private colleges some of the prospective candidates might be discouraged to practice as they feel the increased competition would limit their future earnings. Further, dentist population ratio in urban areas is 1:8000 and in rural areas 1:50000. Dentists' prefer to set up their private clinic in urban areas as more dental health awareness is present amongst urban population compared to rural population. Thus concentrated clinic set ups are present in urban areas making dentistry saturated

CONCLUSION

This study was able to provide a better understanding of the factors influencing students' selection of the advanced education programs and career choices, future job characteristics and obstacles in dentistry. All the students had a positive perception and aspirations regarding their future and career prospects. It would seem that these positive perceptions would bring about the continuous development of dentistry in the coming decades. This study can be a baseline for establishing national policies and for the improvement of graduate programs. There seems to be a need to promote mentoring activities and provide guidance and encouragement to pre-doctoral dental students in selecting the most appropriate specialty and career within their capability domain.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential academic conflict of interest relevant to the above article was reported.

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