



RESEARCH ARTICLE

DENTISTRY AS A CAREER OPTION

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 22nd May, 2016
Received in revised form
29th June, 2016
Accepted 20th July, 2016
Published online 31st August, 2016

Key words:

Dental students, Motivations,
Specialty of choice,
Career choice, Dentistry,
Job satisfaction.

ABSTRACT

Aim: To analyze and determine why dentistry is a prospective career option among students. This study investigates the factors influencing the career choices of dental students

Objectives: The study was designed to measure the level and distribution of satisfaction of dental students and to explore the associated factors. The study also set out to identify the reasons for choosing a career in dentistry and the factors that play a vital role in making that choice. The other objective was to understand the mindset of undergraduates about the profession.

Background: There are many compelling reasons to choose dentistry as a career. Dentistry offers an opportunity to make a difference in a patient's health and well-being. It is a career that allows an independent dental practice. New exciting scientific breakthroughs in gene therapy and biotechnology offer dentists an opportunity to practice current and evidence based dentistry, which in turn improves patient care and satisfaction. Tomorrow's practicing dentists will use cutting edge technology like lasers and computer-assisted diagnosis. This makes the practice of dentistry exciting, challenging and rewarding.

Reason: Dental profession is not only a source of income, but also one that entails practical skills and detailed crafting. In appropriate hands, it gives pleasure, joy, and a motivation to work. It is a profession that enhances the creative skills of the dental practitioner. These factors help improve patient care. As India faces a shortage of dentists, this article is aimed at motivating students to choose dentistry as a career to overcome this problem.

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Citation: Jerusha Santa Packyanathan, 2016. "Dentistry as a career option", *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, (08), 37197-37200.

INTRODUCTION

As the choice of a career is a critical decision that has an important impact on a future life pattern, it is important to understand the priorities and socio-demographic backgrounds of those choosing to study dentistry (Saeed M. Banabilh, 2013). Dentistry is a specialized field of medicine which involves both arts and sciences and is devoted to maintaining oral health. It is a dynamic health profession, offering opportunities to become a successful, highly respected member of the community. The main goal of a dentist is the study, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of diseases, disorders and conditions of the oral cavity. This includes problems with dentition, the oral mucosa, and of adjacent and related structures and tissues. Of particular importance is the maxillofacial (jaw and facial) area (Glossary of dental clinical and administrative terms, 2016). While some individuals enter careers with extensive knowledge and realistic expectations, others may find themselves in occupations not really knowing

why they were pushed in that direction. Some also make career decisions by taking the path advocated by their parents (Aguar *et al.*, 2009). Dentistry is unique as it is one of the most trusted and ethical professions in the world. It offers the flexibility to balance a professional and personal life. Advancements in dental technology such as digital radiography, laser systems and informatics allow dentists to provide more effective treatments and practice more efficiently. New information about the relationship of oral health to general health makes dentistry an important health profession for the future. Many issues may be considered when choosing a career, including one's own strengths and weaknesses, interests and desires, willingness and financial ability to complete a possibly lengthy period of training as well as the type of work involved in a particular career, work environment, financial rewards, availability and attractiveness of alternative careers. Moreover, the relative importance of these factors may differ between men and women (Scarbecz and Ross, 2002). High social status and income, helping people (Scarbecz and Ross, 2002; Vigild and Schwarz, 2001) and self-employment opportunities (Scarbecz and Ross, 2002; Hallissey *et al.*, 2000) are some of the most important factors reported to have influenced dental students' motivation to pursue a career in dentistry. Students'

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motivations for entering dentistry, as well as schools' requirements and selection processes, vary considerably between countries and even within a single country. These situations place great responsibility on dental schools to select the most suitable applicants, both professionally and socially, for the ultimate benefit of communities (Bernabe *et al.*, 2006). The study was designed to measure the level and distribution of satisfaction of dental students and explore the factors associated with it. This study was done to investigate factors influencing the career choice of dental students. This is because there may be several factors that may influence an individual's level of commitment to the profession and the decision may affect one's satisfaction with the career (Saeed M. Banabilh, 2013).

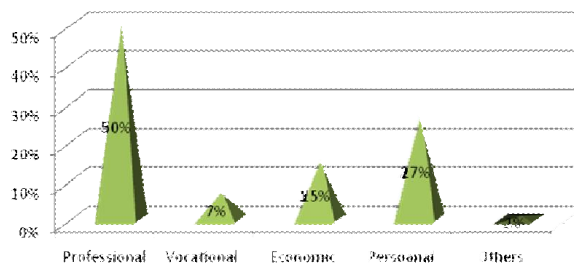
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted among newly enrolled dental students at the beginning of the academic year commencing July 2015 at Saveetha College, Chennai, India. The total number of first-year dental students was 100 persons (24 males and 76 females). Participants were from different socio-economic status, backgrounds, gender and geographical locations. Informed verbal consent was obtained from the participants to conduct the survey. After sufficiently clear and detailed information about the purpose of the study had been given to the students, they were given the questionnaire and were asked to respond to the survey anonymously. The completion of the questionnaire by each student was taken as a form of individual consent to participate in the study. Data collected was analyzed using Microsoft Excel, version 10 and tabulated with explanatory visual charts with respect to parameters chosen.

RESULTS

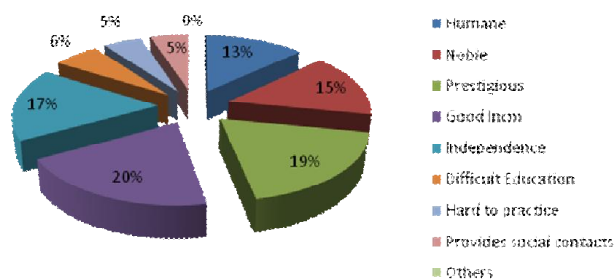
The total number of candidates considered for this study was 100. 24% of them were male and 76% female students belonging to first year of Saveetha Dental College. The students were from different socio-economic backgrounds with a majority (60%) of them having a monthly income of above 30k, 16% were in the income group of 20-30k per month, 5% 10-20k per month and 19% below 10k per month. The stage at which they chose dentistry as their career varied among the participants with 52% choosing this field after schooling, 35% made the decision during secondary schooling and 13% before secondary schooling. People from different walks of life had an impact in the participants choice of dental career with percentages as follows: 36% took the decision on their own, 19% were influenced by a dentist, 24% by parents, 6% by teachers, 6% by friends, 8% by relatives and family friends and only 1% by a vocational counsellor. The first choice of career for most the dental under graduates, was dentistry itself (42%). However, 40% of students initially wanted a career in medicine, 10% in engineering and 8% in other fields. Determining the students' attitudes and perceptions about the dentist's profession was also important for the purpose of this study. Students had various reasons for choosing dentistry with 50% claiming professional motives while 27% had personal motives, 15% economic motives, 7% vocational motives and 1% had other motives.

Motive for choosing dentistry



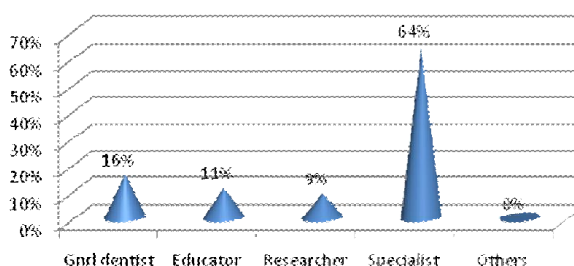
The knowledge the students had about the profession were analyzed with various factors taken into consideration. Twenty percent believed it was a source of good income, 19% thought it was a prestigious profession, 17% were in favor of independence offered by the profession, 15% believed it to be noble, 13% felt it was humane, 6% thought the course to be difficult, 5% believed it was hard to practice and another 5% felt it paved way to improving social contacts.

Knowledge of Profession



The economic reasons for choosing dentistry for a career had the following distribution. Thirty three percent believed it was a stable job, 22% felt it provided constant income, 18% looked on it as source of good income, 14% felt that it had better payment options and 13% believed it will be easier to find jobs. Social reasons listed out as follows - Recognition as a professional had a following of 26%, another 26% felt it was a prestigious profession, 21% believed it to be a noble profession and 27% felt it was a very social profession. Among the professional reasons for choosing dentistry (50%) choose it as they felt it was closely related to the medical field. 13% were motivated by their dentists, 20% were inspired by family and friends, 6% believed it was an easy curriculum and 11% chose this field as they did not get into medical school.

Kind of Dentist



When asked about the kind of dentist they wanted to become, 64% wanted to become a specialist, 16% wished to work as a general dentist, 11% wanted to choose an academic career and 9% wished to become research scholars. Most of the under graduates (60%) wanted to go abroad to work in other countries, 22% did not want to leave India and 18% were undecided as to where they would work. The desire to do social work was quite high with a value of 75%, 6% did not wish to do any social work or charitable service and 19% remained undecided on this issue.

DISCUSSION

The motivation of people, who chose dentistry as a career, shows a wide variety of factors (Scarbecz and Ross, 2002; Brand and Chikte, 1992; Brand *et al.*, 1996; Gallagher *et al.*, 2007; Thomson *et al.*, 2006). Majority of the students studying dentistry came from good socio-economic backgrounds. Dentistry, being a competitive profession, always has a demand for students seeking admission. The reasons for choosing a career in dentistry vary from time to time and are susceptible to changes (Brand and Chikte, 1992). It is essential to consider the major influencing factors in choosing a career in this field in order to clarify whether the choice of a profession is a matter of an individual's decision or whether it was influenced by other people (Nadya Avramova *et al.*, 2014). The findings of this study indicate, a little more than 50% of students chose the field after their schooling, a few made up their minds in high school and 30% when in secondary school. The data obtained did not differ significantly from those of other studies on similar topics (Thomson *et al.*, 2006; Marino *et al.*, 2012; Hawley *et al.*, 2008). Thirty six percent were self-motivated to pursue a dental career, picking a career choice by themselves. This finding is similar to a study in Australia by Marino *et al.* during the 2009-2010 academic year (Marino *et al.*, 2012) A quarter was influenced by parents and family. These results correlated to a study conducted in Istanbul, which presented the key role of family in forming a career choice. About a fifth were influenced by practicing dentists. In a study by Hawley *et al.* (2008) showed that a large proportion of the respondents (52.6%) indicated their family dentist as the person who had the greatest influence on their decision. These findings were comparable to those in studies conducted in Nigeria and Tanzania. (Mugonzibwa *et al.*, 2000; Orenuga and da Costa, 2006) Around 40% initially wanted a career in medicine. However failing to gain entry into medical school, due to insufficient scores, they opted for a dental career. This shows dentistry was a strong second contender as one of the options among students aspiring for a professional career. There could be a proportion of dis-satisfied dentists on account of being influenced by relatives, parents and friends, and also among those not practicing their preferred profession (Yolov, 1986). However in a study done in Bulgaria, dentistry was seen as the first choice of career for 95% of the respondents proving eagerness to explore the aspects of the dental profession (Brand *et al.*, 1996; Thomson *et al.*, 2006). Most students looked at dentistry as a professional career. This is in contradiction to a study done by Aguiar *et al.* (2009) in Brazil, where economic reasons played a predominant role. 40% thought it to be a good and constant source of income. 19% seem to think the career options added a prestige element to their outlook. Some others

chose this career track as it offered independence. According to students in Johannesburg (SouthAfrica), Sydney (Australia) and Amman (Jordan) the independence and financial stability that the dental profession provides were not so important reasons for choosing dentistry as a career (Brand and Chikte, 1992; Brand *et al.*, 1996; Brand and Chikte, 1997; Al-Bitar *et al.*, 2008). While some others looked at it as a noble, humane profession, a small percentage thought the course to be taxing, hard to practice and others looked on it as path to enhance their social contacts. The male to female ratio in this study was 1:4, which indicates an increase in the number of female students in dentistry. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (Mugonzibwa *et al.*, 2000; Weaver *et al.*, 2000; Freire *et al.*, 2011). Many female students take up dentistry as it allows more flexible working hours, because of which they can easily balance their professional careers with the demands of domestic life, Many see dentistry as a way to work with others, achieve financial gain and professional prestige, and serve the community (Brand *et al.*, 1996; Coombs, 1976). These reports are somewhat in agreement with the findings of this study.

Economic reasons were distributed follows. A third believed it offered a stable job, a fifth thought it would provide constant income while another fifth seemed to think it would provide a good income. 14% thought it had better payment options and a tenth looked it as an option to finding easy employment. Al-Bitar *et al.* found that financial motives were among the top ten motivators for Arab male students in Jordan (Al-Bitar *et al.*, 2008). Dental students are also motivated by considerations of personal and financial gain (Crossley and Mubarik, 2002). From the social aspect, recognition topped the list with a quarter listing it as a reason. A similar percentage listed prestigious profession. Around equal percentages thought it to be both a noble and social profession. When questioned about their future career options, two thirds wanted to specialize further and only 16 percent wished to remain a general dentist. A small percentage wanted to pursue the academic side with some wanting to be research scholars. A very large percentage (60%) wished to go abroad to enhance their skills and knowledge. A high percentage (75%) was keen on doing social work in the country. This complements their interest in helping patients and serving a community and the society at large.

Conclusion

Determining the preliminary attitude to the profession, as well as the leading reasons for pursuing it are closely linked to the practitioners' future job satisfaction. From the analysis of the data, the following conclusions were seen. While a large percentage of students chose dentistry as a career, it is seen it only comes in as a second contender for a career choice. According to the first-year dental students, the leading motives for choosing the dental profession are professional and economic. A lot of students thought of dentistry as a professional career with good economic outlook, career independence, satisfying social reasons such as recognition, prestige and nobility in that order of importance. Specializing in a niche field shows up as an overriding desire among the students. A good many show keen interest in going abroad and also doing community service

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