

Choice of career as a dentist – A survey among dental students in Saveetha Dental College

V. S. S. Charan, Revathi Duraisamy, Dhanraj Ganapathy*

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Career is one of the most important decisions one will ever make. The choice of dentistry as a career could offer prestige, relative autonomy, an income above average, the opportunities to help others, creative, and artistic challenges. Dentists occupy an important position in society as professional health care workers. The opportunity to participate in dental education in many countries, especially in the developing countries, is limited to a small percentage of the community. **Aim:** This study aims to evaluate the career options and reasons for choosing dentistry as a career among students. **Materials and Methods:** A questionnaire was developed and circulated among 100 undergraduate dental students studying at Saveetha Dental College. A list of 10 questionnaires that possibly influenced students' decision to study dentistry was presented to the students of Saveetha Dental College. All the students were given an ½ h time to complete the questionnaire. The data were collected, tabulated, and analyzed. **Results:** Forty-three (42.9%) students took dentistry as their own interest. Private practice is a key motive for choosing dentistry. **Conclusion:** Within the limitations of this study, it can be concluded that reasons for choosing dentistry as a career among the surveyed dental students are mostly related to social and vocational factors.

KEY WORDS: Career, Dentistry, Job security, Motives, Private practice

INTRODUCTION

Career is one of the most important decisions one will ever make. The choice of dentistry as a career could offer prestige, relative autonomy, an income above average, the opportunities to help others, creative, and artistic challenges. The work that we do can also influence the choices we make in other spheres of life.^[1] Dentists occupy an important position in society as professional health care workers. The opportunity to participate in dental education in many countries, especially in the developing countries, is limited to a small percentage of the community. In addition, understanding student's reasons to join a dental school and their future career goals may help higher education providers in designing appropriate and effective education materials. Understanding student's reasons may aid higher education providers to provide them with a complete and accurate picture of the profession. It has also been suggested that having an insight into

the motivations of those contemplating dental studies may assist in the evolution of dental curriculum and a better understanding of student's reasons for entering the dental profession and may facilitate a fruitful interaction between the student and teacher.^[2] Students who choose dentistry as a professional career demonstrate a wide range of motivational factors^[3] and since the dominant motivational factors may vary over time and between countries, seeking an understanding of current motivations to enter the dental health-care workforce is critical to health-care systems and may result in major changes for policies in dental education.^[4,5] Dentistry provides a wide range of career and business opportunities as a general practitioner as well as a specialist. Many factors contribute to the students' decision with regard to motivation and the reason to choose a specific medical specialty.^[6] Whether one chooses a specific specialty due to advice from friends or family, admiration of a certain mentor, or genuine interest in the specialty, there are several incentives and factors that converge to result in the final decision.^[6,7] While motivations do vary according to specialties, they may include lifestyle choices, a possibility of private practice,

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Department of Prosthodontics, Saveetha Dental College, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Saveetha University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

***Corresponding author:** Dr. Dhanraj Ganapathy, Department of Prosthodontics, Saveetha Dental College, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, 162, Poonamallee High Road, Chennai - 600 077, Tamil Nadu, India. Phone: +91-9841504523. E-mail: dhanrajmganapathy@yahoo.co.in

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an interest in specific diseases, a varied scope of practice, an interest in research and teaching, or to gain a higher income.^[8] Hence, choosing a field of study becomes elementary, for a wrong choice causes a decrease in a country's scientific level, waste of human and economic resources, incuriosity, and lack of student motivation toward social issues and mental disorders in the student's personal and social life.^[9] The fundamental information about any career is very important for students in deciding the one that fit their abilities and characteristics.^[10] While joining under graduation, the students are attracted toward the course due to the social and professional status, increased quality of life and income, and others' recommendations and to play a role in community health-care services.^[11] Investigating the motives of health students contributes to a better understanding of how they direct their studies; plan their career; to guide them; and to determine the role they play in society. In a broader sense, such investigations may be helpful for planning and evaluating processes in undergraduate health education and health-care services, as these issues may influence institutional curriculum, teaching process, and profiles of the future professionals.^[12]

Increasing number of undergraduate seats with decrease in the number of merit seats/higher fees demand for postgraduation remains a challenge today for majority of the dental graduates. 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. Research into the career options of dental profession is vital to inform dental workforce policy, administrators, and educators to identify the reasons for improving the quality of dental profession in India to uplift the career of Indian dentists.^[13] This study was done with the aim to evaluate the career options and reasons for choosing dentistry as a career among students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A questionnaire was developed and circulated among 100 undergraduate dental students studying at Saveetha Dental College. A list of 10 questionnaires that possibly influenced students' decision to study dentistry was presented to the students of Saveetha Dental College. All the students were given an ½ h time to complete the questionnaire. The completed survey was immediately collected and was analyzed and used for the survey.

Questionnaire

- 1) Reasons for choosing dentistry as a career option?
 - a) Peer pressure

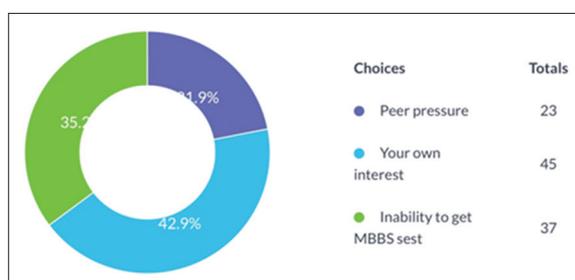
- b) Your own interest
 - c) Inability to get MBBS seat
- 2) Do you consider any of these personal reasons to consider dentistry as a career?
 - a) Inspired by family dentist
 - b) Career of interest
 - c) Father as a dentist
 - d) Inspired by teacher
- 3) Do you feel like any of these professional reasons for considering dentistry as a profession?
 - a) Easy employment
 - b) Pays better than other medical professionals
- 4) Ever thought of changing the profession?
 - a) Interested in changing the profession
 - b) Not interested in changing the profession
- 5) What would you do after completing your degree?
 - a) Postgraduation
 - b) Establish a private practice
 - c) Work in dental college
 - d) Work for a dentist
- 6) Do you intend to go to abroad for further studies?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 7) Should coming generations opt dentistry as a career?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 8) Dentistry can be practiced without doing superspecialty. Was this an influential factor for you to choose dentistry?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 9) Do you consider fees structure of dentistry is less than any other profession?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 10) Do you think dentistry can be good career for women than men?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No.

RESULTS

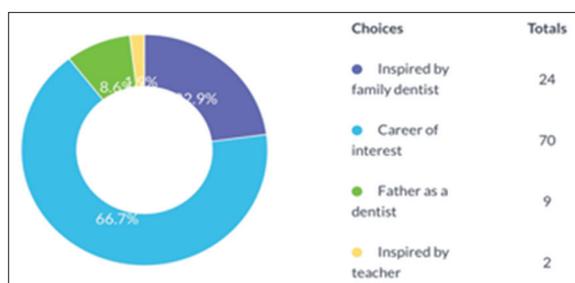
In this study, 100 students were given the questionnaire; the data were then analyzed and have been tabulated along the charts for each question. When the students were asked what is the reason for choosing dentistry, majority (42.5%) had answered that they choose dentistry on their own for interest, 34.9% had said that they choose dentistry because inability to get MBBS seat, and 22.6% of students had said that they choose dentistry due to peer pressure [Graph 1]. When the students were asked about do you consider any of the personal reasons to consider dentistry as a career, majority (66%) of them had said career of interest, 33.6% had said they were inspired by their family dentist, 8.5% of people

said that their father as a dentist, and 1% had said that they were inspired by the teacher [Graph 2]. When they were asked about do you feel like any of these professional reasons for considering dentistry as a profession, 79.4% of students had said that pays better than other medical professionals and, 20.6% of students had said that it is an easy employment [Graph 3]. When students were asked about changing the profession, 78.4% of students had said that they were not interested in changing the profession and 21.6% of people had said that they were interested in changing the profession [Graph 4]. The students were asked what will they do after completing the degree, the majority 55.9% of them had said that establishing a private practice, 30.4% of students had said that they will do postgraduation after completing their degree, 7.8% of people had said that they will work in a dental college, and 5.9 % had said that they will work for a dentist [Graph 5]. When they were asked about going abroad, 72% of people are not interested in going abroad and 28% are interested in going abroad [Graph 6]. When they were asked about

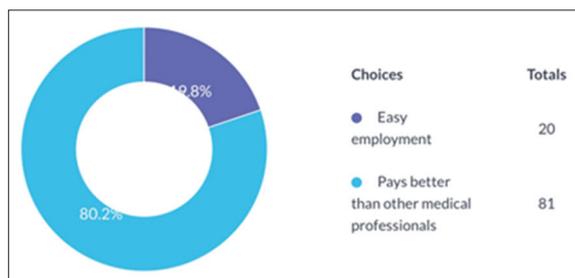
should coming generations opt dentistry as a career, 60% had said yes and 40% had said no [Graph 7]. When the student was asked about can dentistry can be practiced without doing superspecialty. Was this an influential factor for you to choose dentistry, 76.9% had said yes and 23.5% had said no [Graph 8]. When they were asked about does the fees structure of dentistry is less than that of MBBS, 73.7% had said yes and 36.3% had said no [Graph 9]. When the students were asked about dentistry can be good career for women than men, 54.9% had said yes and 45.1% had said no [Graph 10].



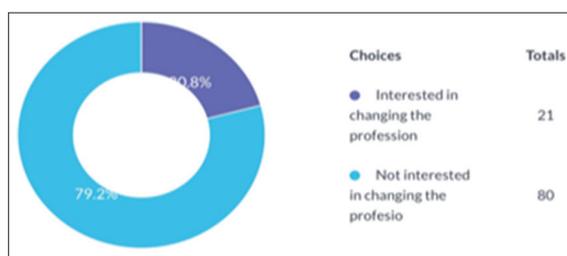
Graph 1: Reason for choosing dentistry



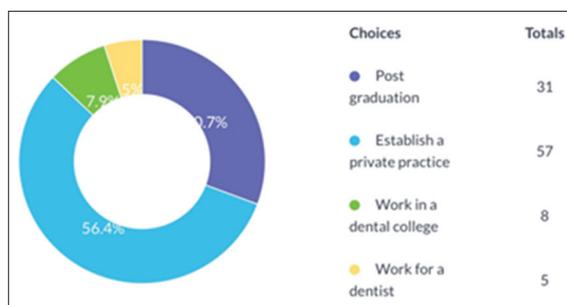
Graph 2: Personal reasons to consider dentistry as a career majority



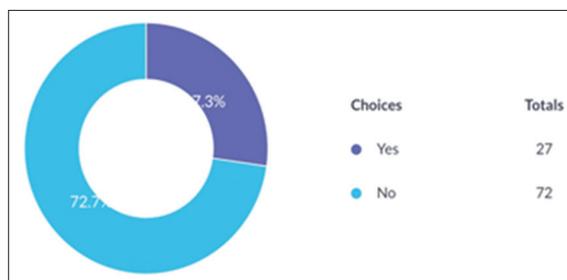
Graph 3: Professional reason for considering dentistry as a profession



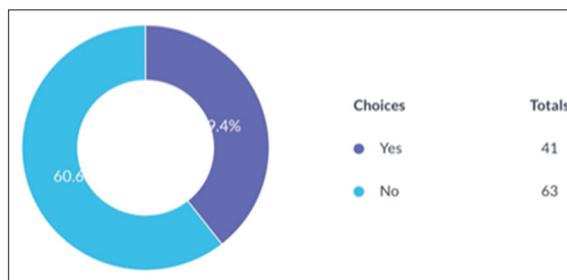
Graph 4: Changing the profession



Graph 5: Options after completing the degree



Graph 6: Going abroad



Graph 7: Opting dentistry as a career

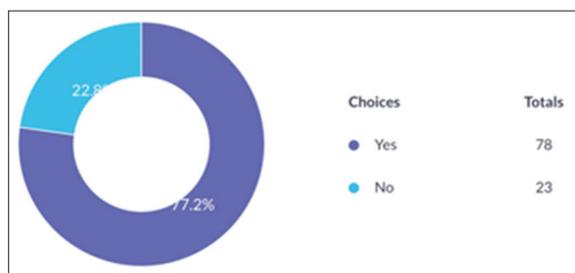
DISCUSSION

This study identified a number of factors directly related to choosing dentistry as a career by Saveetha Dental College students and data on the persons who most influenced the selection of this career. As the choice of a career is a critical decision that has an obvious impact on a future life pattern, it is important to understand the priorities and sociodemographic backgrounds of those choosing to study dentistry. This is because economic factors may influence an individual's level of commitment to the profession and the decision may affect one's satisfaction with the career. 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.^[14]

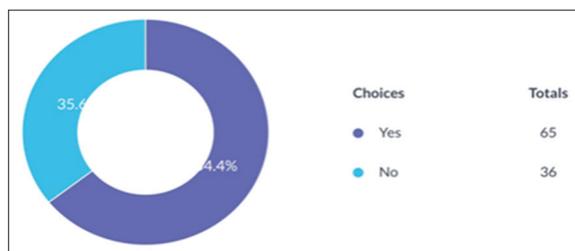
This study, in contrast to the majority of published studies, examined the motives of a wide range of undergraduate students from 1st to final years and interns. The previous studies either have focused

on new entrants to dental school or students as they prepare to leave dental school. It could be argued that it is early for the 1st year students to explore this issue, as experiences after graduation may influence student's perceptions about career choice. Nevertheless, a study observed significant differences between the scores given to the factors and categories of students. However, it is within the overall aim of any research program to provide the opportunity to relate these entire career views to future career plans.^[4]

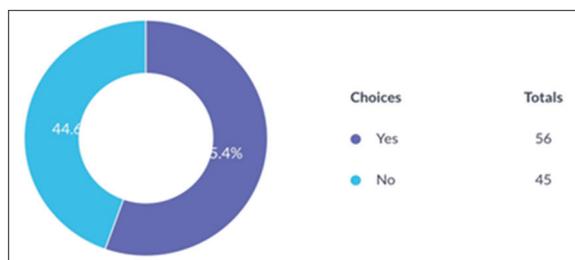
Gender differences in career motivations do exist among this group of students, and in the near future, a high demand for postgraduate dental education in India is expected. "Prestigious," "self-employed," "autonomy," and "helping people" were found to be important motivating factors in this group of dental students in Saveetha University.^[15] It may be a good idea to establish career education programs in schools to educate students on their career choices and employment opportunities following graduation.^[16] Further research should be conducted on a larger population, in which dental graduates are randomly selected from different colleges throughout the country.^[17] Educational policies should be formulated in such a way that the students and graduates are encouraged to pursue career in fields, which are most needed.^[18] Exposure to dental training appears to improve the perception of the students about dental practice.^[19] A curriculum structured to expose the students to core dental courses earlier in their training may, therefore, enhance the perception and acceptability of dentistry to the students.^[20] Teaching staff in addition to teaching the technical aspects should communicate their own passion for the profession. They should also help students to understand the objectives of dentistry and make it easier for students to succeed and become dentists. Dental teachers remain a critical factor in motivating students in the decision process of pursuing dentistry as a career.



Graph 8: Can dentistry can be practiced without doing superspecialty



Graph 9: Fees structure of dentistry compared to MBBS



Graph 10: Dentistry as a career for women

CONCLUSION

The present study reflects a profile of dental students and their responses to a questionnaire probing the motives for their career choice. It is concluded that for choosing dentistry as a career, "caring profession," "job security," "flexibility," "self-employment," and "prestigious profession" were found to be important motivating and perception factors. Within the limitations of this study, it can be concluded that reasons for choosing dentistry as a career among the surveyed dental students are mostly related to social and vocational factors.

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