



Original Research Article

Factors influencing career choice in dentistry: Insights from a survey of dental students and professionals

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Abstract

Background: Choosing a career in dentistry involves various factors, including educational opportunities, personal interests, and professional expectations. This survey investigates the motivations behind selecting dentistry as a profession, the awareness of career prospects following a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), and the overall satisfaction with the career choice among dental students and professionals. Understanding these factors is crucial for improving career guidance and support in the field of dentistry.

Aim: This survey aims to evaluate the factors influencing the choice of dentistry as a career among dental students and professionals.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted from November 7 to November 14, 2022, involving 254 dental students. A 22-item close-ended questionnaire was administered online to assess participants' motivations, career aspirations, and satisfaction levels. Data were analyzed quantitatively, with results presented as numerical values and percentages.

Results: The majority (61.8%) of participants chose BDS due to an inability to secure a seat in MBBS, with 49.2% expressing satisfaction with their decision. Despite concerns about financial issues and competition, 87% wanted to continue in dentistry, with most believing an MDS was necessary, although economic factors influenced this decision.

Conclusion: The study reveals that while many dental students face challenges and uncertainties, a significant proportion remains committed to the field. The findings highlight the need for enhanced career guidance and support to address financial and professional growth concerns and to better inform students about career opportunities within and beyond dentistry.

Keywords: Dentistry career choice, Dental students, BDS (Bachelor of Dentistry), Postgraduate opportunities.

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1. Introduction

Choosing a career is one of the most consequential decisions an individual can make. The significance of lifelong learning in maintaining professional skills, delivering effective patient care, and ensuring career advancement cannot be overstated.¹ For dental professionals, continuous education and awareness about career opportunities beyond the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) are crucial for professional growth and security.² Dentistry as a career offers respect, autonomy, above-average pay, opportunities for assistance, and artistic challenges.³ Despite these benefits, interest in pursuing dental education remains relatively low in many developing

countries, presenting a challenge for dental faculties in selecting the right candidates to serve their communities effectively.

It is normal for healthcare providers to face different challenges as they enter the workforce. These challenges may arise as part of the transition from a student to a practitioner. Students also begin to perceive certain levels of future career challenges at an undergraduate level. It is critical in the dental field for students to know the challenges associated with their future career as there is a rare chance that a dentist can change his/her career after entering the profession.⁴ Factors contributing to the students' intent to pursue academia were assessed, including the effect of dental school programs

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designed to educate students about a career in dental education.⁵

Historically, by the end of the twentieth century, medicine and dentistry had a proven reputation as elite professions, with recent analysis of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service data confirming this continues in the twenty-first century.⁶ However, the lack of proper directions in the policies pertaining to education, service, recruitment, and placement of dental surgeons is a notable feature in India. Despite the large number of dental graduates coming out each year from dental colleges, the country's rural areas remain short of dentists.⁷

Given these challenges and considerations, it is essential to conduct a study to assess the factors influencing the choice of dentistry as a career among dental students and professionals.

2. Aim

The primary aim of this survey is to assess the factors influencing the choice of dentistry as a career among dental students and professionals.

3. Objectives

To identify the reasons why individuals choose dentistry as a profession. To evaluate the awareness of various career opportunities available after completing a BDS degree. To understand the satisfaction levels and future career aspirations of dental students and professionals.

4. Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based survey was conducted to assess the factors influencing the decision to choose dentistry as a career. The study was carried out from November 7, 2022, to November 14, 2022. The survey included 22 close-ended questions designed to gather quantitative data on the participants' motivations, career aspirations, and satisfaction levels. A total of 254 dental students participated in the survey. The data was collected through an online form, and participants were informed about the study's purpose and consented to participate. The responses were analyzed and presented in numerical and percentage formats.

4.1. Data collection

Survey was prepared as an outline form and was sent to potential responders. The questionnaire was distributed online and were asked to fill the answers according to their knowledge. Consent was obtained by all participants in this study. Convenient sampling method was used for data collection and distribution of responses was presented as frequency and percentages. Sub groups were classified on the basis of gender, age and year of study. Data was collected and it was tabulated

4.2. Questionnaire

Name

Age

Gender

Year of study

1. Why did you choose BDS?
 - a. On your own interest
 - b. Unable to get MBBS seat
 - c. Parental or peer pressure
 - d. To get a designation as doctor
2. What was your first impression when you joined BDS?
 - a. Happy
 - b. Ignorant
 - c. Others
3. What was your view about dentistry?
 - a. Confined only to the treatment of tooth problem
 - b. To improve esthetics
 - c. Surgical corrections of maxillofacial anomalies
 - d. All of the above
4. Are you aware of various career options that you can pursue after BDS?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Out of the following how many are you aware of?
 - a. Clinical practice
 - b. Do PG
 - c. Overseas education
 - d. Working private clinic
 - e. Government Jobs
 - f. Teaching
 - g. Work with the armed force
 - h. MBA
 - i. Dental tourism
 - j. Dental blogger
6. Choice after the completion BDS?
 - a. Doing PG
 - b. Overseas education
 - c. Work in private clinic
 - d. Stay at home
 - e. Other work
7. Obstacles that you expect after the completion of BDS?
 - a. Financial insufficiency
 - b. Slow growth of clinics
 - c. High competition
 - d. Not satisfied with the profession
 - e. All of the above
8. Do you want to continue in the field of dentistry?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. If no, alternative choice of interest other than dentistry?
 - a. Business
 - b. Civil service
 - c. Medicine
 - d. Engineering
 - e. Others

10. Do you think it is necessary to do MDS?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. Which branch would you like to opt in MDS?
 - a. Pediatric dentistry
 - b. Public health dentistry
 - c. Oral pathology
 - d. Conservative and Endodontics
 - e. Prosthodontics
 - f. Oral maxillofacial surgery
 - g. Oral medicine and Radiology
 - h. Orthodontics
 - i. Periodontology
12. Reason to go for MDS
 - a. As there is no option except PG
 - b. For your prestige
 - c. Better income and job opportunities
 - d. To get a deep knowledge about the subject
13. Why don't you want to go for PG
 - a. Time consuming
 - b. No job security after MDS
 - c. Not interested
 - d. Expensive
14. Dentistry as a profession can
 - a. Help people
 - b. Help me make money
 - c. Prestige
 - d. Others
15. Population you like to serve
 - a. Urban
 - b. Rural
 - c. Others
16. Where do you prefer to do your dental practice?
 - a. Within the nation
 - b. Overseas
 - c. Not relevant
17. How would you envision yourself in another ten years in practice of dentistry?
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Dissatisfied
 - d. Change career
 - e. Others
18. Do you agree dentistry has given you a platform for research work?
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly disagree
19. Have you ever thought of teaching dentistry rather than practicing it?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe

20. What made you feel that you are not into clinical practices?
 - a. Lack of work skills
 - b. Lack of knowledge
 - c. Lack of confident
 - d. Lack of communication skill
21. Are you happy with your decision in choosing dentistry?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
22. Should coming generation opt to BDS?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. Results

A total of 254 subjects have participated in the questionnaire based survey who are dental students. Majority (61.8%) of subjects chose BDS as they are unable to get MBBS seat. Out of 254 participants 49.2% of them was happy to join BDS. 87.8% of them see dentistry confined only to the treatment of tooth problem, to improve esthetics and surgical corrections of maxillofacial anomalies. 72% of them are aware of various career options that can be opted after BDS. 85% of them are aware of doing PG and 46.5% of the total participants choose to do PG after completion of BDS. 43.7% of the subjects expect financial insufficiency, slow growth of clinics, high competition and also they are not satisfied with the profession after completion of BDS course. About 87% participants want to continue in the field of dentistry. 41.7% of the subjects are interested in other professions such as engineering, medicine, civil service and business as alternative choices if they are not interested to continue in the field of dentistry after BDS. 60.2% of the participants think it is necessary to do MDS after their under graduation. About 31.9% of them likes to opt the branch of Oral & Maxillofacial surgery for their post-graduation programme. 65% of the total participants wants to go for MDS for better income and job opportunities & 39% of the overall participants don't want to go for PG as it is expensive. 42.5% of them chose dentistry as a profession because it can help people. 47.2% amongst the total subjects like to serve urban population and 50% of the total subjects prefer to do dental practice in overseas. 56.3% of participants will be satisfied themselves in the field of dentistry in another 10 years. About 68.1% of them agrees that dentistry has given a platform for research work. 32.3% of participants have not thought of teaching dentistry rather than practicing it. 41.7% of the total have not felt they are into clinical practices due to lack of confidence. 65.4% are happy with the decision in choosing dentistry. About 59.4% of the total participants feels that coming generation should opt for BDS course.

6. Discussion

In this study, 61.8% of dental students chose BDS due to not securing an MBBS seat, though 49.2% were satisfied with

their decision. While 87.8% view dentistry as focusing on dental treatment and aesthetics, 43.7% have concerns about financial issues and high competition. Despite these challenges, 87% wish to continue in dentistry, with many believing that pursuing an MDS is essential for better opportunities.

According to the cross-sectional study conducted by Surekha Rathod et al, among 410 dental students studying in VSPM Dental College and Research Centre, Nagpur about 72.2% of participants gave the reason of inability to pursue MBBS seat followed by the reason of wanting title doctor before their name (12.7%), whereas 5.8 and 8.9% of participants gave reason of having their own interest and parental/peer pressure, respectively². Similarly in this study 61.8% of the subjects chose BDS as they are unable to get MBBS seat.

According to the cross-sectional study conducted by R. J. Shobana Priya et al, among first year students in Madurai, enrolled during the academic year of 2017-2018, got into dentistry by chance as a professional career was 58.7%. Nearly half of the participants, 58.7% of them choose dentistry because they were unable to get an admission in medical course, 28% of them choose dentistry out of interest, 13.3% of them were due to their family influence and the alternative choice of interest for 68% of the students was medicine, other than dentistry. About 77.3% of the students felt that dentistry is not related to aesthetics alone. Nearly 38.7% of the students felt that dentistry could help them to serve people by providing good oral health services⁸. Nearly similar responses has obtained in this present study. As mentioned earlier a greater part of this study opted BDS because they didn't get MBBS seat. Bulk of them (72%) are aware of the different career opportunities available after completing their undergraduate studies but still a dominant portion (65%) thinks that a PG is necessary for their financial growth.

According to the cross-sectional study conducted by Khaled Rateb Al-Hallak et al among undergraduate students studying dentistry in the academic year 2015–2016 at AlFarabi College for Dentistry and Nursing, Saudi Arabia. Variations were identified between male and female students and also between Saudi and non-Saudi students in the reasons to choose dentistry as a career. The vast majority of participants (94%) expressed a desire to follow a postgraduate study. Orthodontics and oral surgery were the most preferred dental specialties.⁹ Comparable outcome was obtained in this study that 60.2% of the subjects think it is necessary to do MDS after UG for better income and job opportunity. Among this 31.9% of them likes to opt the branch of oral surgery for their PG program. The current study did not address differences between males and females in choosing a career.

In the cross-sectional study conducted by Tom K, Gundavarpu KC, Dicksit DD, dental students (BDS Year 1 – 5) at AIMST Dental Institute, 53% had chosen dentistry as it is their career of interest, likewise in this study about half of subjects (49.2%) chosen dentistry as their interest. About three quarter (69%) were of the opinion that dentistry pays better than other medical professions while 48% suggested that dentistry provided them with easy employment. On the contrary, 41.7% of the present study subjects were interested in other professions. In the reference study almost half of the subjects (54%) chose dentistry because they could interact and treat patients.¹⁰ Similar study results were obtained by this study, wherein 42.5% opted dentistry as they had option to analyze and serve people.

This study directly addresses career motivations among dental students, and its meta-analysis nature means it synthesizes findings from many studies, which can offer a robust comparison point for our own results. It's likely to cover a broad range of factors similar to those we investigated.¹¹

This article specifically focuses on career satisfaction and its influencing factors among dental professionals, which directly relates to our study's aim of understanding satisfaction levels and future career aspirations. It could provide a good comparative perspective on professional satisfaction versus student perceptions.¹² Given our finding that a significant portion chose BDS due to not securing an MBBS seat and concerns about financial issues, this article's focus on economic and professional challenges in dentistry would be highly pertinent. It could provide deeper context for the financial concerns highlighted in your results.¹³ This study would be valuable for discussing the perceptions of dentistry as a profession, especially regarding prestige, income, and the blend of science and art, which are implicit in your questionnaire items about "helping people," "making money," and "aesthetics".¹⁴ It provides a contemporary view of what attracts individuals to the field. This article would be useful to discuss the broader context of career guidance and the transition from student to professional, especially if it addresses the gap between student expectations and the realities of practice, which your study touches upon with concerns about slow clinic growth and competition.¹⁵

This study has several limitations. Mainly, sample size of 254 subjects may not be representative of all dental students, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. The use of a questionnaire-based survey introduces self-selection bias, as those who chose to respond might differ from those who did not. The survey's scope is limited, focusing mainly on immediate career choices and perceptions related to BDS and postgraduate options, without exploring other influential factors like family background or personal interests. The study's cross-sectional design captures views at a single point in time, lacking the depth of longitudinal

studies that track changes over time. Additionally, potential misinterpretation of questions by participants and the lack of qualitative data may obscure deeper insights into their motivations and concerns. The geographical and cultural context of the study might also limit its applicability to other regions. Finally, the absence of comparison groups and detailed information on response rates and missing data further impacts the robustness of the conclusions.

7. Conclusion

The survey results underscore that a significant portion of dental students (61.8%) chose BDS due to not securing an MBBS seat, reflecting a common pathway into the profession. Despite this, nearly half (49.2%) are content with their choice, highlighting a degree of satisfaction with the field. The majority of students view dentistry as focusing on dental treatment and aesthetics, with high awareness of career opportunities post-BDS (72%) and the potential for postgraduate education (85%). However, concerns about financial challenges, slow clinic growth, and high competition are prevalent, with 43.7% expressing dissatisfaction related to these issues.

Nonetheless, 87% of respondents are committed to continuing in dentistry, and many perceive pursuing a Master of Dental Surgery (MDS) as crucial for career advancement, driven by economic incentives and job opportunities. A significant portion (42.5%) chose dentistry to help people, with interest in serving urban populations (47.2%) and practicing abroad (50%). The expectation of increased satisfaction in the profession over the next decade (56.3%) and the recognition of dentistry as a platform for research (68.1%) reflect positive aspects of the career.

These findings align with other studies indicating that while financial and professional challenges exist, the commitment to and satisfaction with the dental profession remain strong. Addressing the identified concerns through improved support systems, career counseling, and financial planning could further enhance career satisfaction and professional development in dentistry.

8. Source of Funding

None.

9. Conflict of Interest

None.

Reference

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