



Reasons for Choosing Dentistry As A Career – Survey of Dental Students in AIMST University

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ABSTRACT

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions that one will ever make. However the motivations for choosing a career are yet not clearly defined. Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons for dental students at AIMST University, Malaysia chose dentistry as a career. Method: A cross sectional study was done involving a convenient sample of dental students (BDS Year 1 – 5) at AIMST Dental Institute (n=227). The data were collected and analysed using SPSS software (version 15). Results: Fifty-three percent had chosen dentistry as it is their career of interest while 37.4% chose dentistry as it is rewarding emotionally/socially and financially. Sixty-nine percent were of the opinion that dentistry pays better than other medical professions while 48% suggested that dentistry provided them with easy employment. Seventy-four percent responded that it has got better financial viability. Fifty-four percent chose dentistry because they would like to interact with patients while 42% considered dentistry as a challenging job. Conclusion: Financial rewards, interaction with patients who need help, interest in dentistry and easy employment were the main reasons for AIMST's dental students to choose dentistry as a career.

Key Words: Contributing factors, Dental career, Dental Students, Dentistry

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INTRODUCTION

Choosing a 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 students' 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

Various studies have been conducted to study motives for choosing dentistry as a career option. They include studies done at universities in Canada,³ Israel,⁴ India,⁵ England,⁶ Australia,⁷ Ireland,¹ and United States of America.⁸ The prime motive for choosing dentistry as a career option amongst dental students in various studies ranges from financial security, to become independent, to become a specialized professional, job satisfaction, to attain a living status and service of common man by providing him or her with necessary treatment and alleviating pain.⁹⁻¹³ The purpose of this study was to investigate reasons for dental students at AIMST dental institute, Malaysia, choosing dentistry as their career, and to consider the background factors that had influenced their decision.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study involving a convenient sample of dental students at AIMST was conducted using a questionnaire. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university ethics committee. There were 18 Yes/No items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in English and comprised four subsections; first subsection comprised 5 items on socio-demographic background, second subsection comprised 7 items on personal reasons for choosing dentistry as a career, third subsection comprised 2 items on professional reasons for choosing dentistry as a career, and the fourth subsection comprised 3 items on vocational reasons for choosing dentistry as a career.

Content validity of the questionnaire was checked by 3 faculty staff of AIMST. Subsequently, a pilot survey on twenty-five students, i.e. 5 students randomly selected from each year was conducted to assess the face, construct and criterion validity of the questionnaire. The test-retest reliability was assessed by distributing the questionnaire to the 25 students a week later. A reliability coefficient (alpha) of 0.76 was obtained from the pilot study.

The questionnaire was distributed to a convenient sample of BDS students of Year 1-5 (n=227) after their lecture and were collected on the same day. The members of the study team were present to provide assistance in answering the questionnaire. The study was conducted between 1st February and 15th April 2013. The data was analyzed using SPSS software (version 15). A chi squared test was used with a significant level set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

A total of 227 students responded with 100% response rate. The sample comprised 36.12% (82/227) males and 63.88% (145/227) females. Mean age was 21.87 years.

When the question was asked regarding personal reasons for choosing dentistry as a career, 53% (n=121) chose dentistry as it is their career of interest, 37.4% (n=85) felt dentistry is rewarding emotionally/socially and financially, 25.6% (n=58)

chose dentistry as they are pursuing their education with no specific choice of interest. Fifteen percent (n=34) chose dentistry because they were inspired by their family dentist and 3.1% (n=7) by their teachers. About nine percent (n=21) chose dentistry because they had no other choices left.

As far as professional reasons for choosing dentistry as a career was concerned, 68.7% (n=156) of the respondents suggested that dentistry pays better than the other medical professions while 48% (n=109) were of the opinion that dentistry provided them with good employment prospect.

When the respondents were asked about their vocational reasons for selecting dentistry as a career, 74% (n=168) responded that it offers better financial viability, 53.7% (n= 122) said they chose dentistry because they would like to interact with people who need help (patients) while 42.3% (n=96) considered dentistry as a challenging job.

When we compared the responses between male and female respondents (Table1), there were no significant differences in their reasons for choosing dentistry as a career. The number of female students was definitely higher than that of male students.

DISCUSSION

The scope of the present study was to obtain information about the reasons for dental undergraduate students choosing dentistry as a career. In our study, 53% (n=121) students have chosen dentistry as their profession due to their own interest. This finding was similar to a study conducted in India in 2008.¹⁴ Fifteen percent (n=34) of them chose dentistry because they were inspired by their family dentist which proves that a family dentist also plays a role in one's decision-making towards a career in dentistry.

As far as the vocational and professional reasons for choosing dentistry as a career were concerned, 68.7% (n =156) of the respondents suggested that dentistry pays better than other medical professions. This shows that majority of the respondents will be financially concerned when practicing dentistry.

Brand and Chitke¹⁵ have put forward two important comments about the methodology for assessing self-reported reasons for choosing a

career. The first is that although any behaviour is observable, reasons that impel that behavior are hidden and often beyond the level of awareness.

universities to plan and tailor recruitment techniques to select the most suitable applicants, both professionally and socially, for the ultimate

Table 1: Gender comparison of reasons for choosing dentistry as a career among AIMST dental students.

Reasons for choosing Dentistry as a career	Male (n=82)		Female (n=145)		Overall response (n=227)		p*
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Personal Reasons							
Inspired by family dentist	13	15.9	21	14.5	34	15	0.933
Career of interest	38	46.3	83	57.2	121	53	0.149
Pursuing education with no specific choice of interest	22	26.8	36	24.8	58	26	0.862
Inspired by teacher	3	3.7	4	2.8	7	3	0.982
This profession is rewarding emotionally / socially / or financially	37	45.1	48	33.1	85	37	0.098
No other choice left	9	11.0	12	8.3	21	9	0.663
Professional Reasons							
Easy employment	40	48.8	69	47.6	109	48	0.973
Pays better than other medical professions	59	72.0	97	66.9	156	69	0.523
Vocational Reasons							
Challenging job	35	42.7	61	42.1	96	42	0.960
Like interactions with people whom need help (patients)	38	46.3	84	57.9	122	54	0.123
Better financial viability	63	76.8	105	72.4	168	74	0.567

Multiple responses were permitted for each item.

*Chi-square test; significant level p<0.05

This implies that reasons could only be inferred, at best, as behaviours that are observed. The second point is that whilst behaviour may appear simple and uncomplicated, the underlying motivating factors may be complex, unique and idiosyncratic; and its meaning is often beyond reach of those who are trying to interpret and understand it.

As with many other events in daily life, the choice of a professional career could be considered a multifactorial decision, in which several factors interact simultaneously. Zadik et al¹⁶ have reported that in all prospect, most individuals do not hold to one crucial justification, but consider and act on the sum total of reasons and alternatives in the decision-making process.

Personal characteristics and motives of the students play a major role in shaping their career preferences¹⁷. This can help the dental

benefit of community.

The students who participated in this study represented one dental school in Malaysia. Although their views represented an interesting snap shot of dental students attending AIMST Dental Institute, it cannot be taken as a representative of the views of dental students as a whole. However further studies can be done in a government run dental school as our study was done at a private university.

CONCLUSION

Financial rewards, interaction with patients who need help, interest in dentistry and easy employment were the main reasons for AIMST's dental students to choose dentistry as a career.

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