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Pursuing Public Health Dentistry as a Career: Motivations and Factors Influencing the Dental Students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: A person's career is the process and actions he or she takes to achieve lifetime goals through his or her occupation. Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions one will ever make. Dentistry yields an extensive scope of career and employment chances as a general professional and specialist

Objectives: This study sought the career choices of public health dentistry by dental students and association between socio-demographic profiles of study population with reasons of choosing public health dentistry as a career.

Methods: Cross sectional study conducted at Institute of Dentistry, Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences Jamshoro from 1st March 2021 to 31st May 2021. Sample of 197 undergraduate students were approached using convenience sampling. Data was collected through preformed, validated paper-based survey questionnaire. Association between various socio-demographic variables and career interests of participants was sought by Chi-square tests at 0.05 (2-tailed) level of significance.

Results: Around 69.54% of participants belonged to age group of 21-23 years with females accounting for 59.39%. Around 40% participants chose dentistry to please people. A large majority around 62.42% respondents stated that they find public health dentistry an interesting field. Age ($p=0.08$) and gender ($p=0.06$) of the individuals were not statistically connected with future career choice in dentistry.

Conclusion: Reasons for choosing public health dentistry as a career among the surveyed dental students are mostly related to socio-demographic factors.

Key Words: Career, Public health, Public health dentistry, Profession, Dentistry, Public health specialist

INTRODUCTION

A person's career is the process and actions he or she takes to achieve lifetime goals through his or her occupation.¹ Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions one will ever make.² Dentistry yields an extensive scope of career and employment chances as a general professional and specialist. The choice of dentistry as a profession could offer honor, reputation, self-determination and reward.³ Dentists inhabited a great status in healthcare environment as a professional care worker.⁴ Ideally specialists in public health dentistry promotes oral health.⁵ Great attractions have been observed for choosing dentistry as a profession in many areas of the world and variety of reasons have been attached with this attraction including safety, prestige and ability to have one's own set up.⁶

According to studies, students' motivations for choosing dentistry as a career are not constant and are influenced by societal and internal factors.⁷ As a general professional and a specialist, public health dentistry develops a wide range of career and business opportunities.

In Pakistan, the dental profession lacks curiosity, and academics and research are low on the priority list.⁸ Job content, individual stability, personal delight and preference, to become a professional, ability to be self-employed, inspired nature of the career, independence, reward in society, and help to the poor are the main reasons for choosing public health dentistry as a profession.⁹

Several studies have been undertaken to investigate the motivations for choosing dentistry as a career; nevertheless, there is a scarcity of study on public health dentistry, particularly

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in the context of its selection as a medical profession. Many research has demonstrated that public health dentistry is still in its infancy.³The goal of this study was to learn more about dental students' attitudes toward choosing dental public health as a profession.

Therefore, the objectives of the present study were as follows:

- To investigate the career choices of public health dentistry by dental students immediately after graduation.
- To seek association between socio-demographic profile of study population with various reasons of choosing public health dentistry as a career.

METHODS

The study's execution was approved by the LUMHS Ethical Review Committee (letter no: REC/ LUMHS/-40) To reach a sample of 197 undergraduate students studying in a given setting, a convenience sampling procedure was adopted. The survey was conducted using a pre-tested questionnaire. Piloting was used to validate and assess Croanbach's reliability index, which was calculated as 0.78. The paper-based survey questionnaire, as well as the participants' written informed consents, were distributed in person. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 23 was used to conduct the statistical analysis. For the categorical variables frequencies were computed. Chi-square test was used to look for a link between various socio-demographic characteristics and research participants' career interests. The level of significance was set at a 0.05 (2-tailed) p-value.

RESULTS

A total of 214 dental graduates were approached to get the complete responses of desired sample size of 197. The response rate was computed as 92.05%. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic distribution of the study subjects. Figure 1 reveals various careers options known to the respondents.

The response of participants regarding the reasons for selecting dentistry as a career was such that a large majority of participants around 40% (80) revealed to choose dentistry to please people whereas 35.5% (70), 18.7% (37) and 5% (10) of respondents chose dentistry for a good future, by chance and by choice respectively. The respondents were asked about their opinion regarding public health dentistry to which 62.42% (123) respondents stated that they find it an interesting field and 28.42% (56) said it is a good profession and 9.13% (18) found it a tedious profession

Table 3 and 4 reveals the association of socio-demographic factors of the participants with the career choices in dentistry and opinions regarding public health dentistry respectively.

DISCUSSION

The choice of a career is a significant decision because it has a significant impact on an individual's future life.¹⁰Not only that, but for strategy makers all over the world, the choice of a certain profession and the attitude of students toward their professional career is critical.¹¹In students, the choice of postgraduate specialty and the underlying influencing variables have been studied, but there have been fewer studies on this topic in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Demographic features of a population are major determinants functioning in the background. Any individual's job decision is likely to be influenced by a network of influences that operate before, during, and after graduation. The purpose of this study was to look into selection of postgraduate specialization made by dental undergraduate students which is affected by various contributing factors. This study examines the attitudes of dental undergraduate students about post-graduation, taking into account their age, gender, and year of study.

According to the current study, students who expressed their opinions on dental career persuasion were between the ages of 21 and 23, with a small female preponderance (59.39% females, 40.61% men). As mentioned in table 1, 34.78% of students were in their final year of study. This finding was similar to previous studies which reported more than half of the respondents between the ages of 20 and 23, and that 81.4% of the respondents were females.^{12,13,14}Another study conducted in Karachi found that there were more girls than males.¹a significant chunk of students was enthusiastic about pursuing dentistry and public health dentistry as specialty profession. This was a very positive figure, similar to the findings of a previous study.¹⁵In contrast, a study done in India indicated that just 7% of dentistry students are interested in pursuing a career in public health dentistry.⁶A study conducted in Turkey found that 43.2% of undergraduates pick dentistry as their first career choice.¹⁶While the motivations for selecting dentistry as a profession have been studied in numerous nations around the world such investigations are still limited in Pakistan.¹⁷

According to the study findings, the majority of survey respondents selected dentistry by choice to help others with various dental problems. Furthermore, majority of those polled believe that public health dentistry is an intriguing area to study. This was in stark contrast to previous data, which showed that only 38% of students planned to pursue a specialty career.¹⁸This disparity could be attributable to the fact that only final-year students were selected in the latter study, giving them a more mature perspective on dentistry as a prospective vocation. In a previous survey with similar objectives, 42.45% of the participants chose public health dentistry.¹⁹Year of study was the most prevalent factor impacting decision to specialize in dentistry by choice ($p=0.05$); however, age and gender of the individuals were

not statistically connected with future career choice in dentistry ($p=0.08$ and $p=0.06$, respectively). A study conducted in Turkey showed no significant results.¹⁶ The majority of the participants thought public health dentistry was a good and engaging field when asked why they picked it as a future career; the results were statistically significant across all strata of the subjects, including age and gender ($p=0.001$). The interest of women in dentistry, especially public health dentistry, is comparable to that of populations surveyed in Denmark and Iran.^{20,21} A study conducted in Riyadh discovered a statistically significant link between students' gender and their intention to seek a future profession in public health dentistry.²² Females were shown to be more interested in working in public dentistry careers than males in a poll performed in Saudi Arabia.⁴ While public health was the most popular specialty among individuals, the gender gap was not significant, according to another survey.¹⁹ Another study found a highly significant difference between the genders, with more females admitting that not having much 'on-call' work was one of the reasons they selected dentistry as a career.¹

CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that among the surveyed dental students, the reasons for choosing dentistry as a career, particularly public health dentistry, are primarily related to socio-demographic factors, with a variety of other factors inspiring dental students to pursue a future public health dental specialty. There are gender differences in career motivations among this group of students, so more research with a larger sample size is needed to confirm the trend of change in behaviour regarding career choice and associated factors among dental students, as Pakistan is expected to have a high demand for dental postgraduates in the near future.

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the article. Writing and editing of the article. **Khalida Naz Memon:** Have contributions in conceptualizing the topic. Validation, Supervision and providing the final approval for the publication of the content. **Nimra zaman:** Substantial contribution to the designing of the work, analysis and interpretation of data. Drafted the article. Writing and editing of the article. **Nida Talpur:** Revised it critically for important intellectual content and final approval for the publication of the content.

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Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of study subjects

Variables	Categories	Frequency and percentage
Age	18-20 years	60 (30.46%)
	21-23 years	137 (69.54%)
Gender	Males	80 (40.61%)
	Females	117 (59.39%)
Year of study	1 st year BDS	30 (15.22%)
	2 nd year BDS	40 (20.30%)
	3 rd year BDS	60 (30.50%)
	Final year BDS	67 (34.78%)

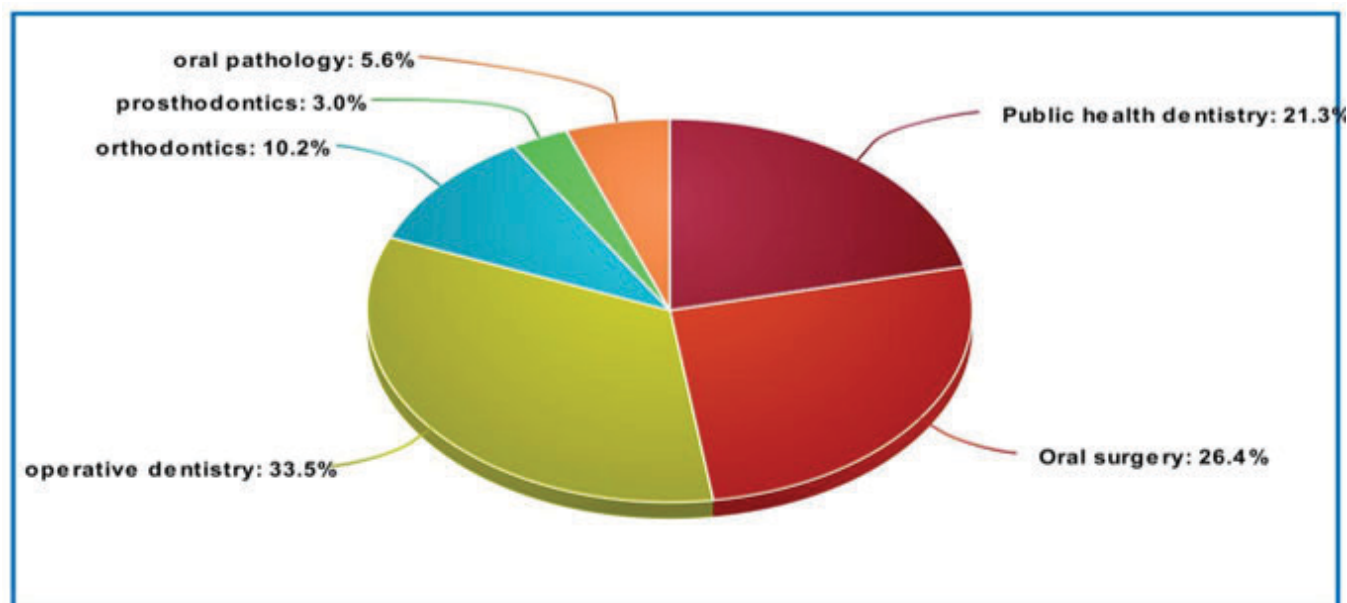


Figure 1: Career options in dentistry.

Table 2: Association between socio-demographic profile and choice of career in dentistry

Variables			Frequency and percentages (n=197)			
			By Chance	By choice	People pleasing	Good future
Choice of career in dentistry	Age	18-20 years	28 (14.21%)	6(3.04%)	45(22.84%)	38(19.28%)
		21-23 years	09(4.56%)	4(2.03%)	35(17.8%)	32(16.24%)
		p<0.05	p=0.04	p=0.08	p=0.02	p=0.06
	Gender	Male	29 (14.7%)	5(2.53%)	48(24.36%)	36(18.27%)
		Female	08(4.06%)	5(2.53%)	32(16.24%)	34(17.25%)
		p<0.05	p=0.001	p=0.06	p=0.01	p=0.05
	Year of study	1 st year	24(12.18%)	4(2.03%)	26(13.19%)	18(9.13%)
		Any other	13(6.59%)	6(3.04%)	54(27.41%)	52(26.39%)
	p<0.05	p=0.01	p=0.05	p=0.06	p=0.07	

Table 3: Association between socio-demographic profile & opinions about public health dentistry

Variables			Frequency and percentages (n=197)		
			Good profession	Interesting field	Tedious profession
Choice of career in dentistry	Age	18-20 years	12(6.09%)	60(30.45%)	4(2.03%)
		21-23 years	44(22.35%)	63(31.97%)	14(7.10%)
		p<0.05	p=0.001	p=0.001	p=0.04
	Gender	Male	6(3.04%)	80(40.60%)	8(4.06%)
		Female	50(25.38%)	43(21.82%)	10(5.07%)
		p<0.05	p=0.001	p=0.001	p=0.03
	Year of study	1 st year	4(2.03%)	30(15.22%)	3(1.52%)
		Any other	52(26.39%)	93(47.20%)	15(7.61%)
	p<0.05	p=0.001	p=0.02	p=0.04	