

# **A Cross-Sectional Survey among First Year Dental Students Assessing the Reasons for Dentistry as a Career**

**Running Title: Reasons for Dentistry as a Career**

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## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** Career choice is one of the most important and critical decisions in a student's life. Educators and admission committees are also interested in analyzing the factors that affect a student's decision to opt for dentistry. Various studies have been conducted to study motives for choosing dentistry as a carrier option. Research into the career motivation of dental profession is vital to assist in counselling of prospective dental students. Therefore, the aim of the study was to determine the factors that led to the choice of dentistry as an occupation among the first-year dental students.

**Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional survey of 100 first year Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) students was carried out using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of total eight close-ended questions, which included demographic (age and gender) and career choice-related items. Data was collected and analyzed.

**Result:** Majority of the respondents chose dentistry as it provides a financially lucrative, contained career in health care, with professional status, job security and the opportunity to work flexibly.

**Conclusion:** In this study, personal factors strongly influenced the student's intrinsic motivation for pursuing dentistry.

**Keywords:** Dentistry, Career, Profession

## **Introduction:**

Dental institution is a place where future dental health professionals become equipped with the knowledge and training necessary to meet the oral health needs of the public.<sup>[1]</sup> All the students select this profession either by "choice", wherein they were interested in dentistry as a profession or by "chance", where they were forced to take up dentistry.<sup>[2]</sup> Motives for choosing a career are complex and the choice of dentistry as a career is no exception. Various studies are being conducted in order to

study motives for choosing dentistry as a career option. Many factors may lead to decide a career. These include working conditions and monetary rewards, security and status, nature of occupation, working with people, use of personal or manual skills and interest in science and research. In addition, parents, relatives, friends, teachers and counsellors also affect the student's choice.<sup>[3]</sup> But it is very important to evaluate the priorities of those who opt to study dentistry as the choice of career has an obvious impact on future life.

Understanding motives of students for choosing dentistry as a career may aid recruiters and educators in not only designing appropriate and effective strategies for planning of undergraduate programs in dental sciences, but also in providing students with a complete and accurate picture of the profession.<sup>[4]</sup> Also, it may help to identify reasons for low academic yield of undergraduate students; thus gives an insight and assist in counselling of prospective dental students.<sup>[5]</sup>

Several studies have been done worldwide on career choice and professional perspective of dental students. However, in India, only few studies have been done under this regard and student's motivation for choosing dentistry are not clearly defined. Hence this study was undertaken to determine the factors that lead to the choice of dentistry as a profession among the first-year dental students.

### **Materials and Methods:**

The study sample included all the first-year students of Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India admitted during the year 2020-2021. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee. Students were informed about the study. Participation was voluntary and students willing to participate were included in the study. The research instrument was a self-designed questionnaire, which students answered in a classroom at the beginning of their first-year BDS course. The questionnaire consisted of total eight close-ended questions which included demographic (age and gender) and career choice-related items. Questions on career choice included various motives to enter into the specialty, ranging from, financial stability, prior interest, knowledge of the prospects of subject to current status and perceptions and plans of the students pertaining to their career in foreseeable future.

The data was collected and analysed statistically. The obtained results and values were evaluated and discussed.

### **Results:**

Reasons to choose dentistry as career option	Response by students (%)	
	Yes	No
1. Career of interest	32.4	67.6
2. Inspired by a family member who is a dentist	17.6	82.4
3. Desired to be self working	90.2	9.8
4. Independency in job	94.1	5.9
5. Potential high income	92.5	7.5

6. Flexible work schedule	84.3	15.7
7. To work abroad	76.5	23.5
8. In order to do DDS	52.9	47.1
9. Service minded	42.4	57.6
10. It offers a specialisation profession	78	22

## **Discussion:**

In the present study, there were 70 female and 30 male students. Majority of the respondents were females, a trend seen in majority of dental schools in India. Increase in female enrollment in dental schools may be attributed to the belief of females about being able to effectively balance personal and professional life, as dental profession allows for a more flexible working schedule. In a study of gender differences in motivations, male students rated self-employment and business-related motives as more important, while female dental students rated people-oriented motives more highly.<sup>[6]</sup>

In our study about 32.4% of students choose dentistry as their career of interest whereas 67.6 % of students was by chance. In contrast to our study results, the results obtained in the studies conducted by Al-Bitar et al,<sup>[7]</sup> Halissey et al<sup>[8]</sup> and Skelly et al<sup>[9]</sup> depicted that more than one third chose dentistry as career option due to interest.

Students in the study reported that the decision of choosing dentistry as a career was largely their own decision. A study in Brazil demonstrated the choice for dentistry made on the basis of economic reasons (73.5%), vocational reasons such as interacting with others and helping people (68.3%), professional reasons (67.8%) and personal reasons (56.6%).<sup>[10]</sup> In a study of Arab dental students, 'prestige' and 'helping people' were important motivating factors in the group of dental students.<sup>[11]</sup> A study by Scarbecz and Ross organized student's motives around four themes: People, money, flexibility, and business factors.<sup>[12]</sup> In a study in North India, 53.7% of the students reported pursuing dentistry because it offers stable work; is highly paid (38.7 percent); and due to the ease in finding a regular job in dental schools or hospitals (7.6%). Flexibility (44.4%) and being self-employed (36.6%) were also acknowledged as important motivating factors.<sup>[13]</sup>

In this study 90.2% of students preferred since it is self working, 92.5% due to potential high income and nearly 95% due to independency in job. This depicts that majority of the respondents chose dentistry as it provides a financially lucrative, contained career in health care, with professional status, job security and the opportunity to work flexibly. This finding was in similar to the study conducted by Umesh et al<sup>[14]</sup> and Crossley et al.<sup>[15]</sup>

About less than half of the respondents; 42.4 % chose dentistry as a path to pay service and welfare to society. And felt they could serve people through dentistry and majority of them felt that dentistry would help them economically or would gain them name and fame.

While exploring the postgraduate aspirations of the students, about 78% of the students pursued dentistry as it offers a further specialisation course. Few students showed enthusiasm for pursuing further studies or working abroad. Continuing one's education abroad presents many difficulties;

including getting an entry visa, high costs, cultural, social, and political complications.<sup>[16]</sup> Plans to work abroad or in private urban setups suggest that students have image of dentistry as a vehicle for the achievement of personal goals. Students did not prefer working in a government setup, but reported a preference for pursuing a private practice, probably because of the heavy workloads and poor pay in the former setup. To maximize efficient delivery of oral healthcare, the issue of making the practice of dentistry more attractive and lucrative to potential dental students who wish to practice in rural areas should be promoted, especially in a developing country like India.<sup>[17]</sup>

Few authors concluded that choice of dentistry was based on an image and concept of dentistry as a vehicle for the achievement of personal goals, such as good job opportunity abroad, financial independence and prestige.<sup>[18]</sup> However, rather than material rewards, the motivating factors for career in dentistry should dominantly involve factors such as intellectual challenge, manual dexterity and caring nature of dentistry. Dentistry provides a clear avenue for pupils from scientific background wishing to pursue an academic career. It not only gives an opportunity for self-employment, but also enjoys a prestigious position in the healthcare profession.<sup>[19]</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

In this study, personal factors strongly influenced the student's intrinsic motivation for pursuing dentistry. The main motives for pursuing a career in dentistry involved student's vision of a bright future in terms of prestige and social status, independence in job and being able to help people.

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