

Original Research Article

Carrier choices and the factors influencing it among medical students in a private medical college in Tamilnadu

Dhananjay Sharma¹, Satyajit Pattnaik^{2*}

¹Department of Community Medicine, Great Eastern Medical School, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, India

²Department of Community Medicine, Meenakshi Medical College Hospital & Research Institute, Kancheepuram, Tamilnadu, India

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*Correspondence:

Dr. Satyajit Pattnaik,

E-mail: drsatyajitpattnaik@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Career choices of undergraduate students are influenced by many factors. The present study was conducted to elicit the most preferred specialty and to ascertain the factors influencing such choices.

Method: A cross sectional study was conducted among the final year and students undergoing internship at a private medical college in South India using a pre designed self-administered questionnaire.

Results: Out of three hundred and fourteen students who participated, 298 want to pursue specialization. The preferred specialties of choice are medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics and orthopedics. The two most important factors which supposedly influenced their career choice are scope for self-practice and stable and secure future

Conclusion: Most students prefer clinical subjects and there were few takers for pre and para clinical subjects. There is a need to analyze the reasons for such preferences and undertake corrective modifications to increase interest in other subjects.

Keywords: Career, Specialty, Choices, Post-graduation, Students

INTRODUCTION

Various factors influence the career choices of undergraduate medical students like, personal interest in the speciality, stable & secure future, reputation of speciality, career progression, high income potential, role models etc also play a role in deciding the career.¹

It has been suggested that an understanding of factors that influence career decisions may help in workforce planning, avoiding over- or under-supply of doctors in different specialties.²⁻⁴ Further, a knowledge of career preferences can assist in curriculum planning.³

Previous similar studies in two governments medical colleges have shown that there is a lack of inclination among undergraduate students to join non-clinical specialties.^{1,5} Medicine and surgery were the most preferred career choices.¹ The present study is aimed at finding the career choices among final year undergraduate medical students and students pursuing their internship after completion of MBBS, and the factors affecting career choices at a private medical college in Kancheepuram district of South India.

METHODS

This was a cross-sectional, questionnaire based study.

After ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethical Clearance Committee, medical students' in their final year and those undergoing internship were requested to self-administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was modified from a previous study and pilot tested for validity.¹

Only final year and students undergoing internship were chosen, with an assumption that, they have supposedly decided their choice of career as they are nearing the end of their undergraduate studies. The questionnaire includes besides some socio-demographic information, their first career choices and the factors that they feel influenced their decision. Participation was voluntary. Data were entered into an MS Excel worksheet and analyzed using EPI INFO version 3.1.

RESULTS

The total number of students available for the study was 320, out of which 314 were present on the day of the study and participated. Out of this, 16 students did not plan to pursue a specialization, and want to change to some other profession like civil services, management, business etc. and were excluded from the final analysis. Most of the students wish to specialize in clinical subjects like medicine, surgery, pediatrics etc. Table 1 shows the preference of students for different specialties.

Table 1: Top five specialties of preference.

1 st Preference	2 nd Preference	3 rd Preference
Medicine (26)	Pediatrics(33.8)	Medicine (18.3)
General Surgery(20.4)	Medicine(23.5)	Pediatrics (13.4)
Obstetrics & Gynecology(14.5)	General Surgery(12.8)	General Surgery (10.7)
Pediatrics(13)	Obstetrics & Gynecology(11)	Orthopedics(9)
Orthopedics(10.3)	Orthopedics(9)	Dermatology (7.6)

Values in parentheses are percentages.

Table 2: Top five specialties of dislike.

1 st Most Dislike	2 nd Most Dislike	3 rd Most Dislike
Obstetrics & Gynecology(18.6)	Community Medicine(17.3)	Community Medicine(17)
Community Medicine(18)	Obstetrics & Gynecology(12.8)	Orthopedics(8.3)
General Surgery(17)	General Surgery(9.3)	Obstetrics & Gynecology(7)
Medicine(9.6)	Orthopedics(6.5)	ENT(6.5)
Orthopedics(5)	Dermatology(5.5)	General Surgery(6)

Values in parentheses are percentages

Table 3: Factor(s) influencing the choice of specialty.

Factor	Percentage
Scope for self-practice	44.2
Stable and secure future	43.8
Influence of family	37.0
Personal interest	35.2
Lifestyle/prestige	34.6
Career progression	34.2
Reputation of the specialty	32.8
High income	32.5
Research opportunities	20.7
Less workload / work pressure	20.4

DISCUSSION

Out of a 314 students, 16 students (5%) did not plan to pursue a postgraduate course after MBBS. They want to switch their professional career and go to other field like civil services, management, business etc. Student of medical sciences switching to other profession will result in waste of resources, that too, at a time when there is already a scarcity of doctors in India. There is an urgent need to find out the cause of this dissatisfaction with the profession and take necessary steps to prevent this in future.

Most of the students were considering a career in clinical subjects which is reflected in their choice /preference for these subjects as shown in Table 1. Those students who did not get this clinical subject of choice will ultimately take up a career in pre and para clinical subjects out of compulsion. Many of them will have no passion or commitment to the subjects which will lead to mediocrity.⁵ If this trend persists there is likely to be a shortage of faculties in pre/para clinical subjects.⁶

A look at the preferences shows that most students prefer to take up medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics and orthopedic. For a majority of the students one of these subjects is among the 1st, 2nd or 3rd preference. This trend was similar to the findings of another study done in a government medical college in Delhi.¹

A close scrutiny of the list of most disliked subjects throw up an interesting finding. The list of disliked subjects also has the same names like, medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, and orthopedic. This may be perhaps due to strong likes and dislikes of the students to particular subjects. Many subjects like community medicine, ENT and most pre and para clinical subjects have few takers. There is a need to go into the details for such preferences, so that, if possible, some interventions can be planned to modify such career choices.¹

The two most important factors which were supposedly influenced their career choice are scope for self-practice and stable and secure future. Other factors that were

mentioned as important are influence of family, personal interest, lifestyle/prestige, career progression, reputation of the specialty and high income. These factors are almost the same as those reported by students in India and in other countries in Asia.^{1,2,3,7}

Role models from faculties and post graduate residents tend to influence career decisions.^{2,3} We can try to modify students' opinion about some subjects during rotations in order to influence their career choices.⁸

CONCLUSION

Career choices are biased in favor of few subjects. There is an urgent need to find out the reasons for this and necessary changes initiated to modify this.

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