

INTRODUCTION

Diverse factors motivate dental students into a career in dentistry. These may be driven by socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, professional prestige, and desire to help others. It has been reported that students attend dental schools to be independent (with a higher possibility of self-employment), serve others, as well as the attraction of the psychomotor skill of the profession, the acquired social status and/or financial security; being upwardly socially mobile, and having a flexible work schedule.

In the last two decades, data from various countries show an unprecedented change in gender ratios in the workforce, with the rise in the number of female workers in several fields of the labor market; this particularly evident in the field of dentistry. Females were found to choose dentistry because they believe they will balance their personal and professional lives effectively as dentists. They were also less concerned with the business component of a career and more concerned with the caring and people factors.

The evaluation and understanding of the influences on students' choices and factors that affect these choices can be beneficial, since it may help in planning health care policies and design appropriate and effective recruitment, and setting entrance structures and requirements for dental schools. Moreover, an insight into students' motivation could assist in designing and evaluating dental curricula, as well as enables productive communication between students and educators.

AIM

This study aimed to evaluate the influences and motivators of career choice into dental education by dental students and to explore and analyze factors involved in choice and motivation. It also aimed to evaluate students' confidence in the choices made to allow for insight, that help in planning university admission policies, also provide understanding into what students need to know about the career choice in dentistry before embarking on them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

One hundred seventy-three surveys were distributed to all registered dental students, with a response rate of 85%. The survey questionnaire explored students' demographics and factors that influenced their career choice. Seven focus groups were facilitated, and related data recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Quantitative Data:

A 23-item survey questionnaire was developed to explore gender, demographics and the factors and influences on students' career choices. Survey dependent variables were the factors relating to decision to select dentistry – personal choice, influence of mother, father, dentist, teacher or friend and factors motivating a choice of dentistry – desire to help, reputation of the profession, independence, financial aspects, academic interests, job prestige, working hours and job security. Survey independent variables were the students' demographic data including age, gender, marital status and mothers and fathers' academic qualifications.

Descriptive statistical analysis was made and Pearson Chi-square tests was conducted to evaluate significant factors influencing the decision.

Qualitative Data:

The focus groups were conducted in an open conversational style, and the conversations were digitally and professionally transcribed verbatim and notes were made after each focus group session. The qualitative data analysis used the principals of the constant comparative method of grounded theory (GT)

RESULTS

The quantitative data revealed the desire to help others, and socioeconomic factors were influential, while for parents' influence, the mother's influence was statistically significant (table 2).

Qualitatively, results converged and complemented quantitative data; there was a balance between helping others and socio-economic and familial influences. There was an increase in confidence in the choice made as students advanced in their dental education. The results indicate that informed awareness of the dental program structure is essential before embarking on a dental career.

	Personal decision			P-Value
	Agree	Disagree	Total	
Male	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100.0%)	0.461
Female	127 (95.4%)	6 (4.6%)	133 (100.0%)	
Missing	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)	
Total	140 (95.3%)	7 (4.7%)	147 (100.0%)	

TABLE 1 Fisher exact test of the association between gender and personal decision-making

	Gender				
	Gender	Gender	Gender	Gender	Gender
Desire to help, treat or serve people	136 (92.5%)	6 (4.1%)	5 (3.4%)	0 (0.0%)	<0.001
Reputation of the profession	125 (85.0%)	14 (9.5%)	5 (3.4%)	3 (2.0%)	<0.001
Interest in dentistry as profession	129 (87.8%)	9 (6.1%)	7 (4.8%)	2 (1.4%)	<0.001
Working independently	113 (76.9%)	20 (13.6%)	11 (7.5%)	3 (2.0%)	<0.001
Financial opportunities of the profession	124 (84.4%)	16 (10.9%)	5 (3.4%)	2 (1.4%)	<0.001
Academic interest	123 (83.7%)	15 (10.2%)	7 (4.8%)	2 (1.4%)	<0.001
Interest in dentistry as a branch of medicine	123 (83.7%)	11 (7.5%)	9 (6.1%)	4 (2.7%)	<0.001
Degree leads to a prestigious job within the society	121 (82.3%)	14 (9.5%)	8 (5.4%)	4 (2.7%)	<0.001
Reasonable working hours	115 (78.2%)	15 (10.2%)	13 (8.8%)	4 (2.7%)	<0.001
More job opportunities	107 (72.8%)	17 (11.6%)	19 (12.9%)	4 (2.7%)	<0.001
Job security	99 (67.3%)	16 (10.9%)	27 (18.4%)	5 (3.4%)	<0.001

TABLE 2 The association between personal decision and motivation

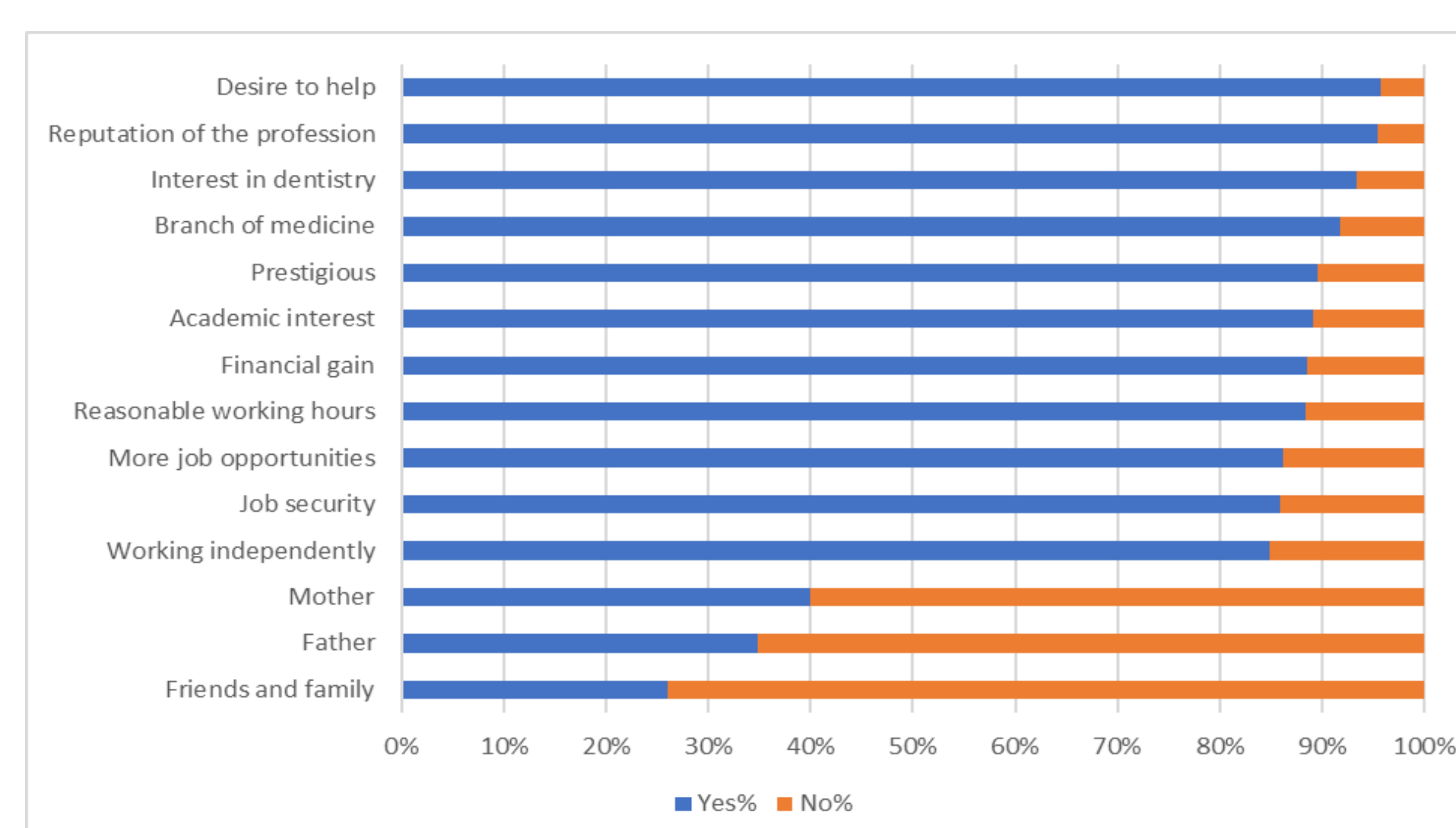


FIGURE The factors impacting on career choice in dentistry

CONCLUSIONS

The factors that impacted on choice were helping others and socioeconomic factors and the influence on choice came from family. Participants were generally satisfied with their choice and were confident in the choice they made. This confidence, however, was not reflected until the more advanced clinical stages of their dental education.

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